POEMS AND DRAMAS

GEORGE CABOT LODGE

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POEMS AND DRAMAS
OF
GEORGE CABOT LODGE

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL. II

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OF

GEORGE CABOT LODGE

VOLUME II

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1911

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Published October 1911

THE GREAT ADVENTURE
THE SOUL'S INHERITANCE AND OTHER POEMS
HERAKLES

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THE GREAT ADVENTURE

TO
W. S. B.

I

LIFE

I

Pride, power and substance of created things,
Gross, vital element of all that is,
Womb of interminable pregnancies,
Perennial source of earth's resurgent Springs —
O Life! crude matrix that forever clings
To thought's clear diamond, dark chrysalis
Big with prodigious birth, unsunned abyss
Headlong beneath the soul's Icarian wings!
When, as my peers before me, I shall fall
Shattered with light, and, lost beyond recall,
Mix and resolve in thy creative slime, —
Thence shall I rise in endless avatars,
And still once more, for Truth's eternal stars,
Leap from the cloud-capped battlements of Time!

II

PRIMAVERA

Spirit immortal of mortality,
Imperishable faith, calm miracle
Of resurrection, truth no tongue can tell,
No brain conceive, — now witnessed utterly
In this new testament of earth and sea, —
To us thy gospel! Where the acorn fell
The oak-tree springs: no seed is infidel!
Once more, O Wonder, flower and field and tree
Reveal thy secret and significance!
And we, who share unutterable things
And feel the foretaste of eternity,
Haply shall learn thy meaning and perchance
Set free the soul to lift immortal wings
And cross the frontiers of infinity.

III

Life gives the pass-key of his treasure-house
Into our hand, saying, "What diadem,
What gold of glory, what illustrious gem
Man shall desire of me, shall crown his brows!"
And nothing of all man's choice Life disallows,
Whether of prized or priced or priceless things:
By the feast-tables heaped with offerings,
"Enter!" he cries to all men, "and carouse!"
And thus after our will, in greed and haste,
For certain years we choose and use and waste,
Suffer and strive: — save some few restless men
Who seek, uncrowned, unfriended, alien
And careless of the flushed festivity,
The path thro' life and death to liberty!

IV

Unspeakable are the felicities
Of labour and long endurance for the Truth:
Love's sea at flood in the rash heart of Youth,
Freedom and spiritual ecstasies!
Incredible are the discoveries
Of Life's adventure: on the high, outcast,
Star-severed pathways Life may stand at last
Thrilled witness of the soul's divinities!
And always Night beyond! — infinite, strange,
Teeming, inviolate, where the peaks of thought,
Flushed by an unseen Dawn, superbly range
Down the long frontiers whence the restless soul,
Forward, beyond the last and best it sought,
Still finds a path, a prospect and a goal!

V

We trod into the starlight, into the night;
The ways of our deliverance were not mild:
Long had we been contented and beguiled,
And long importunate lovers of the light.
Long had we sought and scorned the false delight
Of perishable things and things defiled, —
Reckless at last we passed unreconciled
Out thro' the darkness in all men's despite.
And much we suffered, and spent our strength and youth
On the steep paths, and lived in loneliness,
Till, as our life-blood fed the lamp of Truth,
Ruin rent down the fortress-walls of Fear,
And light was kindled in the blind, austere
Ways of the soul's eternal restlessness.

VI

Twilight of Truth's unfettered wanderings!
Skies of supreme adventure, lightning-crossed!
Tho', as we soar alone, perchance, and lost,
Strange ethers yield beneath our desperate wings,
The diapason of Life's singing strings,
Large as the pensive murmur of still seas,
May reach us, and of all Truth's galaxies
Haply one star console our sufferings.
We stand, at least, too far beyond to heed
The protest vacant and grandiloquent
Of timid, rich and pious men: the event
Is ours to win or lose, and ours the faith
That he who sows the Truth's immortal seed
Shall harvest in the fields of life and death!

VII

TUCKANUCK

1

TAKE me away to the sea, O carry me
Down to the sea where there is space and light,
Where stars abound in the gigantic night,
Where soul and flesh are unconstrained and free!
Carry me back! for I once more would see
The midnight sky's moon-silvered azurite,
The calm lagoon at noonday wide and white, —
Carry me down! O take me to the sea!
O take me hence to the innumerable
Deep-rumouring waters! Let me feel the core
Of life reëcho like a chambered shell
The voice and motion of the immensity!
Carry me back! — O Soul, from Life's dark shore
Take me away forever to the Sea!

VIII

2

Powerful, patient, vast serenity
Of Nature's fathomless tranquillities:
Inviolate silence of the starlit skies,
Deep respiration of the windless sea:
There may we rear the towers of thought in thee,
Pluck forth the secret from the Sphinx's eyes,
Ransom from countless chance captivities
Man's inarticulate divinity!
There may we find the faith which dares disown
Nothing that is, the faith by which alone
We, peradventure, shall be justified;
There may the Soul go forth and there return
Or here no more, but pass from bourne to bourne,
Ever from life to life unsatisfied!

IX

3

Shall we return, return once more and stand
There where at sunset we may thrill to see
The skies flash kindling like the noontide sea,
The birds pass seaward from the darkling land?
Shall we return and on the stainless sand
Hear, as of old, the waves' wild minstrelsy,
And feel once more the heart within us free,
The soul within us strong to understand? —
We shall return! and in the silence find
Ever the nameless peace, the calm delight,
The spacious meditations of the mind,
Wherein, dilate with Truth's unfailing breath,
Our souls may witness Life's immortal light
Fill the dark chambers of the House of Death.

X

4

There may we learn at daybreak and nightfall,
  As day and dusk and darkness cover us,
  With earth and sky and the omniverous
  Infinite sea of ceaseless flood and fall, —
There may we learn how love is spiritual
  And death divine and life illustrious,
  There may we find at last the fabulous
  Truth and compose the soul's high ritual.
There may we haply find ourselves, the goal,
  Ourselves, the source of all enlightenment,
  And thus discern how earth and sky and sea
And love and life and death and destiny
  Are wrought of one eternal element
  Quarried in dim deep strata of the Soul.

XI

5

We loved too perfectly for praise
  The spread of noon's sun-startled sea,
  We loved the large tranquillity
  Of flowing distances and days.
In calm, dark sunsets or the blaze
  Of moonlit waves, the ecstasy
  And spacious thought of liberty
  Thrilled us in deep and silent ways.
We loved too much for song or speech
  The stars' exalted loneliness,
  And in the tacit tenderness
Of hearts thrown open each to each
  We found the perfect peace that brings
  A foretaste of eternal things.

XII

6

We loved the illimitable night,
  We loved the interminable sea,
  We loved, on flower and vine and tree,
  The candid foliage wet with light.
We loved the thunder and the might
  Of mountains and ineffably
  We loved the power that made us be
  Lovers of life and life's delight.
We loved the innocent joys of earth,
  The poise and peace of natural things,
  We loved the miracle of birth;
We loved, beyond life's last release,
  The shadow as of stirless wings,
  The silence and majestic peace.

XIII

7

We found a symbol and significance
In day by day the changed and changeless sea,
In night by night each glittering galaxy,
The cosmic pageant and extravagance.
Lost in the devious labyrinth of chance
We sought the endless thread of liberty,
And in the shadow of the Mystery
We watched for light with sleepless vigilance.
Yet still how far soever we climbed above
The nether levels, always, like a knife,
We felt the chill of fear's blind bitter breath:
For still a secret crazed the heart of Love,
An endless question blurred the eyes of Life,
A baffling silence sealed the lips of Death.

XIV

8

How often in the tranquil evenings,
  There by the kindled sea's immense unrest,
  Has love, like music in the human breast,
  Thrilled us with incommunicable things!
How often, as we watched the sea-birds' wings
  Flash in the sunset on their homeward quest,
  Have life's large secrets, by the soul confessed,
  Taught us the pride and peace that freedom brings!
How often have we felt the calm of thought
  Quell the storm-shaken waters of the soul,
  Till, land-locked by the cliffs of Time, they caught
The silent gleam of Truth's unchanging stars,
  And felt the universal ocean roll,
  Muffled and vast, on Life's dissolving bars!

XV

9

O South-wind, silvered by the crescent moon,
Breathe on my shadowed sail and carry me
Homeward across the sunset-coloured sea,
The rose and violet of the calm lagoon.
There where the high and homeless stars shall soon
Thrill the vast darkness singly, silently,
Carry me back, O South-wind, tenderly
Thro' the gold dusk of closing afternoon.
And as thou bear'st me on my homeward way,
With what few leaves of Truth's immortal wreath,
What spiritual, secret victories,
Are mine; so, homeward from life's little day,
The golden-winged, star-silvered wind of death
Shall take the soul with all its argosies.

XVI

10

In some clear, crystalline, calm-murmuring
Midnight, or when the cloud-sierras rise
Massive and flame-swept in the sunset skies,
Or in the noonday broad and glittering,
We shall return! The endless wind shall bring
Sea-perfumes and sea-rumours and the cries
Of scattered sea-birds, while our shrunken eyes
Grow spacious in the vast horizon's ring.
There day by day in high intelligence
Of Nature, we shall learn her parable;
We shall explore thought's wide circumference;
We shall return at last! and find the soul,
By indications untransmissible,
Always the steadfast centre and the goal!

XVII

ODYSSEUS

He strove with Gods and men in equal mood
Of great endurance: not alone his hands
Wrought in wild seas and laboured in strange lands,
And not alone his patient strength withstood
The clashing cliffs and Circe's perilous sands:
Eager of some imperishable good
He drave new pathways thro' the trackless flood
Foreguarded, fearless, free from Fate's commands.
How shall our faith discern the truth he sought?
We too must watch and wander till our eyes,
Turned sky-ward from the topmost tower of thought,
Haply shall find the star that marked his goal,
The watch-fire of transcendent liberties
Lighting the endless spaces of the soul.

XVIII

KALYPSO

Sorceress of his charmed captivity,
Of all love's gifts she was munificent;
Yet was he unpersuaded to content
Incurious of love's warm felicity,
Fain of departure on the treacherous sea:
Heedless he was whether his life were spent
In shipwreck on the cruel element,
So he were homeward bound, so he were free!
And even as he adventured life and cast
Pleasure and passion from his home-sick heart,
Still, tho' in exile, mindful of his goal;
So, after long enslavements, we, at last
Reckless and undissuaded, shall depart,
Free and bound outward, homeward to the soul!

XIX

EGYPT

Reliquary of Time's vicissitude,
Proof of persistent change, and prophecy, —
Rapt in thy myths and monuments I see
Visions that throng thy soundless solitude:
The pageant of a rumouring multitude,
The celebration and the mystery
Of occult and august Divinity
Sculptured in hieratic attitude; —
Till I discern across the shadow of years
The self-same tragic life and death of men,
The passion and the pathos and the tears,
The love and labour of humanity:
And know at last, tho' Time's abysmal sea
Divide us, yet we are not alien!

XX

In Time's cathedral Memory, like a ghost
Crouched in the narrow twilight of the nave,
Fumbles with thin pathetic hands to save
Relics of all things lived and loved and lost.
Life fares and feasts and Memory counts the cost
With unrelenting lips that dare confess
Life's secret failures, sins and loneliness
And life's exalted hopes, defiled and crossed.
Shalt thou endure, O Memory, and thy breath
Quicken the dead in thy dominion
And fire the peaks of thought we dared to climb,
When, in the swift relentless chill of death,
The crawling ice-floes of oblivion
Strangle thy passage thro' the seas of Time?

XXI

O Memory, Mistress of the heart's despair,
  Spirit of solitude and silent tears,
  Pilgrim thro' twilights of departed years
  Peopled with ghosts of all that once we were —
Pale vampire of the graves of Time, forbear!
  Suffer the dead to rest! each ghost appears
  Desolate in thy darkened atmospheres,
  And joy is bitter and pain is perfect there.
Thine are the days gone irretrievably: —
  Forbear, O Memory, for the heart will break!
  Unless the Soul shall, peradventure, wake
Wonderfully, and, elate with mystic powers,
  Rend as with lightnings of eternity
  The graves of the interminable hours!

XXII

Days that have been and nevermore shall be,
Children of Time the sword of Time has slain,
Great hours of life when heart and soul were fain
Of Love's pure fire and Truth's eternity, —
Now, on the marches of that dim domain
And desolate sunset-land of Memory,
Ye rise like tortured ghosts and silently
Walk in the sombre twilights of the brain.
And we, like pilgrims on the path of Time
Who find no rest nor any dwelling-place,
We follow blindly in Life's retinue,
While, like the furies of Orestes' crime,
The spectral hosts of Memory on our trace
Innumerably assemble and pursue.

XXIII

QUESTIONS

Curious of life and love and death they stand
Outward along the shadowy verge of thought;
Rebels and deicides, they rise unsought
And spare no creed and yield to no command.
Even tho' at last we seem to understand,
Yet, when our eyes grow sphered to the new light,
We find them, outposts in the forward night,
Their eyes still restless with the same demand.
On all the heights and at the farthest goal
Set by the seers and christs of yesterday
They watch and wait and ask the onward way;
They storm the citadels of faith and youth,
And, gazing always for the stars of Truth,
Crowd in the glimmering windows of the Soul.

XXIV

TO NIGHT

Thou canst console our sad humanity
With dreams of unimagined loveliness,
Or cast the shadow of forgetfulness
Over the haggard eyes of memory.
The deep unrest of man's infinity
Thou canst appease, for all thy stars confess
The living soul's imprisoned loneliness,
And heart finds liberty alone in thee.
Thou shalt complete us all who love and learn
The secret of thy silences, till we
Arise regenerate from the throes of strife,
And in thine all-receptive peace discern
The ineffable presence of eternity
Waiting forever at the gates of life.

XXV

Thus were our lives resolved! "The Dawn," we said,
"Is somewhere since the light is everywhere;
Pinnacled in the universal air
The tower of thought, we must believe, shines
red!"
By blind belief at all adventure led,
Thus were our lives resolved at last to dare.
Also we knew that up the endless stair
Socrates and some few were gone ahead.
But when at length we climbed into the light,
In wild alarm we saw how far it springs
Across death's void impassable atmosphere, —
Then, as our great resolve grew sick with fear,
We felt the freedom and the infinite
Ambition of the soul's expanded wings!

II

LOVE

TO HER

I

O SEA, nature's eternal palimpsest,
O stars that dawn, as memories one by one
Break on the dark void of oblivion,
O poem of love that fills the fragile nest, —
Whisper to me! Stir me to great unrest,
O passionate chaunt! Immortal antiphon,
Proud pæan of life that peals from sun to sun,
From flower to flower, from human breast to breast,
Sound in my soul! and thou, O heart, resound,
O lips, proclaim! for where her lips have clung
There must the lyric pulse beat tense and strong;
And where she lives with love must life abound
With music unimagined and unsung
To mend Truth's ravelled tapestry of song!

II

She is the sea's star-smitten amethyst;
  She is the light of long, incredible
  Sunsets; she is the myth and miracle
  Of love and Love is life's protagonist.
She is the soul and tragic heart of youth;
  She is the dreams and raptures that foretell,
  In legend, lyric, poem and parable,
  The spacious and supreme vision of Truth.
In life's last desolation and distress
  She is the touch that sets the Door ajar;
  She is the peace, she is the passionless
Chill wonder of the Night's infinite breath;
  She is the nameless light, the mystic star
  In the illimitable skies of Death.

III

Thunder, like thunder of the wind-scourged sea,
Of shouting multitudes and smitten lyres,
The perfumed smoke of sacrificial fires,
The palm, the pæan, and the ecstasy
That once confessed thy deep divinity
Are gone: the music fails, the rapture tires, —
But still heart burns, soul reaches, sense desires
For thee, only for thee and all for thee!
For thou art She, indubitably She,
The dear dream-woman, fatal and unknown,
Lilith and Helen and Eurydice;
And for thy sake man laughed at God's decree,
And brought the haughty towers of Ilium down,
And trod the pits of Hell because of thee.

IV

Her soul is free from Time's fantastic trance:
No infidelity has vexed her eyes
Where burns the light of spiritual skies
Deep and unshaken by the winds of chance.
Her beauty gives a new significance
To life, and new desires and dignities,
And exaltation of new stars that rise
Over the dark ways of deliverance.
Love is her captive and her minister;
The golden shadow of the wings of love
Lies warm and tranquil on her naked breast:
She is the World's Desire, the shrine whereof
Life is the pilgrim, and in quest of her
All men have striven and suffered without rest!

V

Her days are like the white processional
Of sacred virgins who, transfused with bliss,
Moved round the altars of Hermopolis
With equal pace and measured interval.
For, like the God of Gods, possessed of all
The mighty meaning of the Mysteries,
She over-sees the endless theories
Of Time from summits clear and spiritual.
And I, beside her shrine, with bated breath,
Far in her eyes' profound horizons see
Ever the pulse, the ebb, the upward roll
Of light, — the day of life, the night of death,
Passing beneath the altars whence her soul
Watches in undisturbed divinity.

VI

Her hair is hued like shadow where light is
Tragic and tense and tranquil, and her eyes
Burn in their depths the splendour of such skies
As sunset kindled over Naukratis.
It may be, when the walls and towers of This
Stood in magnificence and rang with cries
Of myriads in their flashing panoplies,
She shone with the Immortals! — God! we miss
The secret of life's lost divinity!
The days, like Sphinxes, one by one repeat
Their silent question and devour us!
How shall we learn the answer? How shall we
Scatheless endure the sacred flame that beat
And brake the desperate wings of Icarus?

VII

I GIVE my whole life for her dwelling-place,
And all my days are mansions made for her,
And all my heart is like a harp-player
Singing with eyes insatiate of her face.
And she, for the same love's sake, in the trace
Of my dark journey follows everywhere,
And from the labour of truth and the despair
She can console me in her deep embrace.
For Love has made her body of his delight
And of his sacred frenzy, and his light
Is calm and ardent in her perfect eyes;
And Love has shared his faith and liberty
Between us, who are blent inseparably
In the communion of his mysteries.

VIII

She moulded life, with hands subtle and wise,
Into the faultless fashion of a vase
Carved as of emerald or chrysoprase,
And bossed with mythic shapes of Paradise.
And brimmed it was with fire of sunset skies,
And deep sea-amethyst, and crystalline,
Calm starlight, all distilled into a wine
Clear and perturbed with splendour like her eyes.
And, as we slaked the thirst that gave no rest
By day or night, with solemn ecstasy
We knew such vineyards of the soul were pressed
To yield this very heart's-blood of our love,
That from our hands the cup, once drained thereof,
Must fall and shatter irretrievably.

IX

That day of the innumerable days
  Was like a gate set open secretly,
  Where the swift sense of immortality
  Drave us from Time's interminable ways.
Clear as a song's inviolable phrase,
  Tender as sunset on a windless sea,
  Our sudden hearts yielded ineffably,
  Our eyes drank deep of Truth's eternal rays.
We saw how blind and aimless on and on
  Time journeys, while the ripened harvests stand
  Of Truth and Liberty on either hand;
And so we reaped and made the sacred bread
  And poured the wine of Love's communion:
  And there that day the starving soul was fed.

X

In the shadow and glamour of the ways,
With a passion more mighty than we were,
With the strength of desire, we followed where
We found Love's light that leads and never stays.
And yet not thus, alone for what repays
The passion that is life for best and worst,
The desire that is hunger, that is thirst,
We wrought Love's labour of all our nights and days.
Nay, not alone the great hilarity
Of Love's brimmed cup and Life's high festival
Gave us good warrant of the quest: thereof
Were we resolved, because, for one and all
Of Love's true partisans, we seemed to see
The Truth alive in the deep heart of Love!

XI

My lips were bruised against her lips, my eyes
Drowned in her eyes as in a star-lit sea;
My life sang brokenly to her, and she
Trembled with inarticulate replies.
I felt the rapture that in Paradise
Woke in their hearts, who, heedless of the cost,
Yielded to love; like waters tempest-tossed,
I felt her breast beneath me fall and rise.
And when at last our hands and eyes and lips
Severed, still, deep in life's undying heart,
We felt the birth of poems, the springs of song;
And saw, by winds of music borne along,
Our souls go forth on love's high seas, like ships
Making Truth's voyage without helm or chart.

XII

Her breast is perfumed and profound as sleep;
Her fervent, mythic face is clear and fair
And pale as light; thro' all her sombre hair
The tragic splendours of the sunset creep.
And now for me her soul and senses keep
Incessant vigil, and because we share
The journey she will neither ask nor care
Whether the ways of love be smooth or steep.
Her eyes that watch for mine are starred and strange
As tho' there lightened on her inward sight
New vistas of the soul's unfettered range;
As tho' she saw, across the passive night,
On far horizons of the seas of change,
By Love's decree made manifest, the Light!

XIII

We shared the silent faith and truth of things!
Her life seemed all in all to sing to me,
And mine replied in clear antiphony,
Wild as the music of wind-smitten strings.
Hers was the mood of one who subtly sings
In low, long sunsets by a windless sea;
Far in her languid eyes I seemed to see
The flash of unimagined lightenings.
And when against her breast I felt the core
Of life grow eager, while within her kiss
Trembled the broken rhythm of her blood,
I cried, "O slay thy worshippers, O God
Of Love! for life must be forevermore
After this joy a lesser joy than this!"

XIV

My lips shut hard against her lyric throat;
Her hands were tense, her pulses tremulous:
Life burned and languished while I held her thus;
The feet of Time grew soundless and remote.
Glitters of Truth's consummate splendour smote
Our eyes with fire, and music, over us,
Like spheres of crystal clear and marvellous,
Fell thro' the faultless silence note by note.
When life and time drave us once more apart,
Life seemed a hollow shell of irised pearl
Filled with the song-pulse of her gorgeous heart;
And Time an eyeless ghost who, thro' the night
Where stars burn and dawn lifts and lightnings whirl,
Strove to constrain me from the paths of light.

XV

She stood in the weird moonlight of a dream,
And in the light there was incredible
Silence, and on her lips no syllable
Of any speech, and in her eyes no gleam.
And by her still white feet the narrow stream
Paused in its flood, forgetful of the sea,
In shining silence, and it seemed to me
That silence quelled the stars and reigned supreme!
And terribly I felt there was no stir
But only silence in the heart of her,
And silence in her soul! — Then was I hurled
Back into life, and woke, and knew that she,
In moonlit silence, somewhere in the world
Waited alone and motionless for me.

XVI

Her eyes are spacious as the starlight is;
Her brows are clear and pale as porphyry;
Her breasts are hueless as young ivory,
Save where they crimson, wounded by a kiss.
Her beauty wears the mood of Nemesis;
She is aloof from Time and Memory;
Her hands were shaped for love, and utterly
Her lip's deep curve was carved and stained for this.
I will alone, in silence, go to her
And feel beneath my kiss her pulses stir,
And in her hair the perfume of Love's breath;
And she will understand and bear with me
The joy of life, the pain, the mystery;
The thought, the fear, the loneliness of death.

XVII

We strayed in Time's dream-haunted night
And watched the voiceless stars of thought
That thro' the warp of darkness wrought
Their frail and faithful threads of light.
But when life's passion blurred our sight,
We cried, "It dawns! Desire has brought
That guide our souls have vainly sought
For life, the way-worn eremite!"
Yet from the dazzled eyes of youth
The fire, subdued to sunset, cleared
At last, and we were left with truth:
For there, above the sunset's bars,
Still changeless and on high, appeared
The boundless night, the steadfast stars.

XVIII

We loved the moon in strange sweet ways,
The moon that loved Endymion;
We loved the stars that one by one
Swelled thro' the sunset's golden haze.
We loved the skies of chrysoprase,
Pale violet and vermillion, —
The skies that soon must yield the sun;
We loved our proud, impassioned days.
We knew the gain of love is love,
We knew mere life is happiness,
We knew nor grief nor death can prove
That love is lost or life is less: —
We guessed the vaster scope thereof,
Closed in the cosmic consciousness.

XIX

She said: "Heart breaks — yet, strangely, into song!
Then, when I leave thee, is there nothing lost?
God knows, in your account and mine, the cost,
Tho' all of life must pay and life be long,
Is not too much! yet day by day the strong
Monotony may blunt the edge of pain
And leave us joyless, till we wake again
To find our lives have done the Truth much wrong.
Nay! for the present and ineffable flame
That kindles at the core of life, shall last
Beyond remembrance! Time shall never tame
The Truth, but like a pillared watch-fire
It still shall cheer our pilgrimage and cast
New light to guide the quest of soul's desire!"

XX

When she returns to me, when there is sound
And motion of her, and perfume of her,
And light and laughter of her eyes that were
The stars whither my homeless life was bound, —
When she returns and all my days resound
With Love's clear voice, who is her chorister,
And all my heart is shaken with the stir
Of Love's wide wings, and all my life is crowned
With her and her delight and her desire,
And all the night long, strong and swift as fire,
Her deep caress responds to my embrace, —
When she returns what shall I offer thee,
Upon thine altars in thy dwelling-place,
O God of Love, when she returns to me?

XXI

What save her memory has Time left to me?
The memory of the twilight of her hair,
The memory of her breast, profound and bare,
And of her mouth the dazzled memory!
For Memory, in the paradise that we
Seemed in Love's morning of the world to share,
Wanders alone, and, thro' the stagnant air,
Shows her small light in the obscurity.
And Memory too shall perish, as the stream
Of time flows ceaseless and resistless on!
Yet, when again Love makes our twain souls one,
May we not glimpse, thro' life's dissolving dream,
Rays of imperishable light that seem
Dawn in the dark depths of oblivion.

XXII

Remembrance is a desolate loneliness:
Alone we watch the light of life's lost days
Fade, strange and spectral, in the soundless ways
Of immemorial time, forever less.
The lustre of her living loveliness,
Soft as a song's most tense and tender phrase,
Seems like a windless sunset's golden haze,
Arched by the nightfall of forgetfulness.
Gone is the perfume of her naked breast,
Gone are her hands' caress, her lips' desire:
And in the House where once the feast was spread,
The chambers garnished for a nobler guest,
Amid the scattered ashes of Love's fire,
Pale Memory crouches, weeping o'er the dead.

XXIII

I KNOW in some far, fabled place,
Some land of old, immortal things,
The thrilled remembrance of our springs
Returns with spring to vex her peace.
Hearkening with pale impassioned face
As Life's faint fingers sweep the strings,
She hears an inward voice that sings
The Love too strong for Time and Space.
She knows, how much soever the loss
Of days unshared is loss indeed,
Yet stars shine up the endless sky,
That bear, from heart to heart across,
Still the foreverlasting need,
The love too greatly lived to die!

XXIV

I THOUGHT she came in hushed and secret wise
And stood in silence close beside me here,
Mantled in some gold-glimmering atmosphere,
Deep as the light of sunset-splendid skies.
Then, with her breast's smooth curve, her lucent eyes,
Haunted with visions of the lonely soul,
Her high white face, she seemed the mythic goal
Of some fantastic, fabled enterprise.
Then, till my thirst was quenched, my hunger fed,
I seemed, with hands that clung and lips that kissed,
To hold and to possess her utterly;
While all her passion and beauty were to me
The lustral wine, the sacramental bread
Laid on Love's altar for Life's eucharist!

XXV

Vainly the days return, in vain by night, —
Since thou art gone! — the stars stand choir-wise;
Gaunt as a moonlit road the future lies, —
Since thou hast left me! — to the verge of sight.
Since thou art gone there is no more delight
Of life, since thou hast left me! and the skies
Of love are dark, since now between our eyes
Kindles no more the imperishable light.
Thus are the Gods revenged for what we won
Of the celestial fire! The forward way,
Our way, as must be, goes superbly on,
Heedless of our disaster. Night and day
Flash up the abyss where one eternal ray
Falls from one steadfast star — perchance a sun!

XXVI

She said: "I know the miracle is this,
This pause and foretaste of eternity:
Time was for us and time returns; but we
To-day guess something, for life's chrysalis,
In one transcendent metamorphosis,
Shatters, and wings flash sky-ward, and we see
Suddenly — stars! — and now no less can be
Declared of life than what the secret is!
Yet time returns, and death perchance is long
And time eternal, — but the stars that throng
Our skies of silence live beyond control
Of death and time, for, guessing at the goal
Of truth, we rise, thro' ringing spheres of song,
And find them glittering steadfast in the soul!"

III

DEATH

TRUMBULL STICKNEY

OCTOBER 11TH

MCMIV

Καὶ μὴν ἔγωγε θαυμάσια ἔπαθον παραγενόμενος. οὔτε γὰρ ὡς θανάτῳ παρόντα με ἀνδρὸς ἐπιτηδείου ἔλεος εἰσῄει· εὐδαίμων γάρ μοι ἀνὴρ ἐφαίνετο, — ——, καὶ τοῦ τρόπου καὶ τῶν λόγων, ὡς ἀδεῶς καὶ γενναίως ἐτελεύτα.

— ΠΛΑΤΩΝΟΣ ΦΑΙΔΩΝ.

I

The House of Life has many mansions, where,
Like men dream-haunted in unquiet sleep,
We seek and strive and suffer, laugh and weep,
And fear the Truth, and mask the soul's despair.
And much in festival, and much in prayer
And sorrow and hysteric thanks-givings,
And more in labour for little and low things
Our life's brief interval is wasted there.
And only when magnificently some one
Of all the dreaming myriads, patiently
Shapes the great key and slants the secret door, —
As he departs we feel the blinding sun,
The pealing song, and know his soul is free,
Bound in the dream of life and death no more.

II

"He sought, believed, dared, found and bore away
The light. The deed, the deathless deed was done!
What mattered it that then Deukalion
Was filled with wrath, resentment and dismay?
What tho' God's bird, relentless, day by day
Tore his immortal heart, and God's high sun
Blistered his eyes? — the man endured and won!"
He said — and smiled in his tremendous way.
And then I knew how fiercely and alone
The Titan had withstood resistless things
And let the soul's accomplishment atone!
Had climbed blind pathways thro' the strangling night,
And, with the courage of his sufferings,
Had seized and kept, for life and death, the Light!

III

"Nothing is spared," he said, "nothing is lost!
Life, from the House of Death, returns again;
There is salvation of the parcelled grain,
And certain harvest where the seed is tossed.
Life never dies, and life the Truth has cost,
And love and lonely labours of the brain!
Therefore the light of Truth shall most remain
After the night-fall and the night are crossed!"
And thus he stared with high expectancy
Into the terrible, blind vacancy,
Until, across the stricken field of Death,
His eyes seemed darkly to discern a goal, —
And we beheld the daybreak's boundless breath
Glimmer against the windows of his soul.

IV

"That we, however least, however less
Than Time's recorded heroes who have bled
And burned and lived and died for Truth," he said,
"May still, in proof of all our lives profess,
Join with their great companionship, to press
In ways where none who are not free may tread, —
We must endure to die! and, being dead,
To live in death's transcendent loneliness!"
And thus thereafter we beheld him live,
Rapt in the faith of those who most believe,
Who most are curious and unsatisfied;
Till, to the summits and the silences,
Where all the Mighty stand with Socrates,
We saw him rise transfigured as he died!

V

He felt the blind, lost loneliness increase
As life compelled him to the final test.
He said: " The refuge of defeat is rest;
A soul's dishonour is the price of peace!
From star to star the flight shall never cease;
The Truth, perforce, is long and last and best:
Thro' life and death, with bruised, defenceless
breast,
We seek the sunrise of the soul's release!"
And so he lived and almost died and died:
The night, the silence and the solitude
Left him magnificent and unsubdued; —
And we, who kept the vigil by his side,
Saw, when at last the door was opened wide,
Flash in his eyes the Dawn his soul pursued.

VI

He said: "What death leaves derelict is dead:
Thus may we circumscribe mortality!
Yet in the last release, when all is free
To the free soul, who shall escape?" he said,
"Haste, lest we sleep, lest we be comforted,
Lest we forget! for we must learn to be
Visionaries of Truth's eternity,
Star-gazers constant and unsatiated."
Thus we beheld him, steadfast and sublime,
Passing alone in eminent, strange ways
Of great adventure thro' the massive night;
Until at last, after prodigious days,
Outcast over the precipice of Time,
His eyes, triumphant, cried: "The Light! The Light!"

VII

"We serve no God, nor in the retinue
Of creed or faction are we crowned and fed!
Therefore no less than our belief," he said,
"No less than all that we were faithful to,
No less than capital and revenue
Of all we won of Truth's inheritance,
No less than our achieved significance,
No less than all! in justice is our due!"
And then, before he left us, day by day,
And when his dumb, deserted body lay
Folded in death's impenetrable cloak,
By many a sign and proof no tongue can tell,
We knew the Justice that he dared invoke
Was swift and sure and indefectible!

VIII

I WELL remember how one yesterday
Of all our lives' intense communion,
He said, "In Death's austere dominion
Only the coin of Truth's device can pay
The price of liberty! — What alien way
Might chance direct us, when oblivion
Sets us adrift from all we were and won?
Or take us from ourselves whither away?
Therefore must we, for our deliverance,
Levy on life the toll of truth!" he cried.
And so he lived indeed — but when he died,
Beyond all proof I seemed to understand
That he, from Death's outstretched and friendly hand,
Received his ransom and recognizance.

IX

"At least," he said, "we spent with Socrates
Some memorable days, and in our youth
Were curious and respectful of the Truth,
Thrilled with perfections and discoveries.
And with the everlasting mysteries
We were irreverent and unsatisfied, —
And so we are!" he said. And when he died
His eyes were deep with strange immensities.
And all his words came back to me again
Like stars after a storm. I saw the light
And trembled, for I knew the man had won
In solitude and darkness and great pain; —
But when he leaped headlong into the Night,
He met the dawn of an eternal Sun!

X

He said: "We are the Great Adventurers,
This is the Great Adventure: thus to be
Alive and, on the universal sea
Of being, lone yet dauntless mariners.
In the rapt outlook of astronomers
To rise thro' constellated gyres of thought;
To fall with shattered pinions, overwrought
With flight, like unrecorded Lucifers: —
Thus to receive identity, and thus
Return at last to the dark element, —
This is the Great Adventure!" All of us,
Who saw his dead, deep-visioned eyes, could see,
After the Great Adventure, immanent,
Splendid and strange, the Great Discovery!

XI

Above his heart the rose is red,
The rose above his head is white,
The crocus glows with golden light,
The Spring returns — and he is dead!
We hark in vain to hear his tread,
We reach to clasp his hand in vain;
Tho' life and love return again
We can no more be comforted.
With tearless eyes we kept steadfast
His vigil we were sworn to keep:
But, when he left us, and at last
We saw him pass beyond the Door,
And knew he could return no more,
We wept aloud as children weep.

XII

We knew he lived alone with loneliness
Day after day. We did what men could do:
Men could do nothing, — or, at most, a few
Moments persuade him to forgetfulness.
We often smiled — perhaps in sheer excess,
Perhaps because we found him smiling too.
We never wept, and he divinely knew
The love that gave us strength, nevertheless.
In solitude as tho' in dungeon walls
His soul was held sequestered and confined.
We always wondered how it was he bore
The tense intolerable intervals
Wherein he waited, steadfast, breathless, blind,
To hear the hand of Death unlock the door.

XIII

In silence, solitude and stern surmise
His faith was tried and proved commensurate
With life and death. The stone-blind eyes of Fate
Perpetually stared into his eyes,
Yet to the hazard of the enterprise
He brought his soul, expectant and elate,
And challenged, like a champion at the Gate,
Death's undissuadable austerities.
And thus, full-armed in all that Truth reprieves
From dissolution, he beheld the breath
Of daybreak flush his thought's exalted ways,
While, like Dodona's sad, prophetic leaves,
Round him the scant, supreme, momentous days
Trembled and murmured in the wind of Death.

XIV

At last the light leaped in his patient eyes!
And he, transfigured by the breathless sense
Of an eventual magnificence,
At last forbore life's small felicities.
Then, as beneath Death's starred and silent skies
His life's large sunset lingered, calm and tense,
His faith revealed, in days of dark suspense,
Proof of the soul's immortal destinies.
Yet, when at last the heights he dared to climb
Sphered him in solitudes no tongue can tell,
Then, tho' we knew not all our love could share
With him the last adventure, as he fell
We leaned over the parapets of Time
And saw strange splendours in the abysmal air!

XV

With life and lips he said tremendous things!
Yet, when he died, I most recalled the smile
Which day by day he gave us to beguile
The crude disaster of our sufferings.
He knew what we believed or half-believed:
How from the Lakes of Hell the fabled springs
Rise to his lips who most divinely sings,
Who, tried in truth, has most superbly lived.
Therefore his calm lips smiled because he stood,
And we beheld him stand, in loneliness,
Lost in the shadow of Eternity;
Therefore at last his eyes revealed the mood,
Thro' mortal passion and sublime distress,
Of one reborn into divinity!

XVI

Times were when, reeling on his eminence,
He seemed to doubt the event: — if, after all,
His strength could well endure what must befall
And hold his breath in anguish and suspense.
And we, who watched with every fibre tense,
There, so to speak, within his sight and call,
At every such momentous interval,
Measured the man's surpassing excellence.
And when, crouched silent by the silent gate,
We saw him pass within, alone with Fate,
We seemed to hear, as thro' the closing door,
The shouting of star-choirs, and to see
The sunrise flash against his brows that wore
The glory and the gold of victory!

XVII

I saw that day in his dead eyes
The light that suffers no eclipse,
I felt the chill on his dead lips
Of shoreless seas and starlit skies.
I knew he lives indeed who dies
A champion in the lists of Truth,
I knew the days of all his youth
Were tournaments and victories!
And yet once more heart-brokenly
I kissed his lips and clasped his hand
And suffered darkly, humanly;
Till, there beside his corpse and me,
I almost seemed to see him stand,
Dead — and alive, triumphant, free!

XVIII

THERE moved a Presence always by his side,
With eyes of pleasure and passion and wild tears,
And on her lips the murmur of many years,
And in her hair the chaplets of a bride;
And with him, hour by hour, came one beside,
Scatheless of Time and Time's vicissitude,
Whose lips, perforce of endless solitude,
Were silent and whose eyes were blind and wide.
But when he died came One who wore a wreath
Of star-light, and with fingers calm and bland
Smoothed from his brows the trace of mortal pain;
And of the two who stood on either hand,
"This one is Life," he said, "and this is Death,
And I am Love and Lord over these twain!"

XIX

Because for some tremendous cause he chose
To meet his life's supreme catastrophe
In silence, and with grave serenity
To bear alone the last, remorseless woes,
We turned the tide of dreadful tears that rose
High on the shores of Life, resolved to be
True to his tragic, tense tranquillity;
And day by day we often smiled — God knows!
But, when at last he died and we were left
Utterly, irretrievably bereft,
Blear-eyed with vigil by the Great Abyss,
We found no tears because the man was dead, —
But there beside his corpse! — God knows — instead
We shared with him unutterable bliss!

XX

All thro' the night most strange it was to see,
Vigilant of him as he lay there, dead,
The eyes of Love singing beside his bed,
Clear as the dawn-stars singing over-sea.
At last Love turned his eyes to mine, and said,
"Love is the Lord of Life, and I am he!
Walk in my ways and thy despair shall be
A dungeon whence the captive soul has fled!"
Then I beheld how all unscathed he passed,
With high, calm face and eyes unterrified,
The destined Door of all that perisheth;
So, as I caught his hand and held it fast,
"Whither thou goest I will go!" I cried,
"O Lord of Life, O Lord of Life and Death!"

XXI

The stately silence, the perpetual peace
Of death's inscrutable, divine event
Lay on his body like a sacrament,
In calm assurance of the soul's release.
Gone forth on the great ways that never cease
With all the Mighty and Magnificent
Whose souls like his were strangers to content,
We knew he voyaged for Truth's Golden Fleece.
And we, who, day by day and hand in hand,
Had fared with him in close community
Of high endeavour to the treacherous sand
Edging Life's continent, we turned our eyes
Seaward, and there, far forth, we seemed to see,
Full-sailed and outward-bound, his Argosies!

XXII

We said no word of all men use to say,
But, when the childish jargon of the priest
And all the stale formalities had ceased,
We laid him in the earth and went away.
Mysteriously thereafter all that day
We felt, like adepts at a sacred feast,
Rapt in austere rejoicing, and released
From all dark bounds of life's dim-vistaed way.
And all that night about me in the gloom
I felt great consummations and the stir
Of high events, and in the dawn's first breath
I saw a presence by the empty tomb,
Who said, "I am the Great Deliverer!
I am the Life!" — I looked, and it was Death!

XXIII

We bore the chill, persistent dread
Here in the long, tree-shaded way;
And here the things we could not say
Were more, I know, than man has said.
These are the paths that felt his tread,
This is the bench where sunset lay
So large and tranquil day by day, —
And I return, and he is dead!
And I must bear to feel the breath
Of desolation thrill and swell
My broken heart's discordant strings!
While he, who bore life's utmost things, —
In the immensity of Death,
With him it is not less than well!

XXIV

DAYS

Still on his grave, relentless, one by one,
They fall as fell the mystic, Sibylline,
Sad leaves, and still the Meaning's secret sign
Dies undeciphered with each dying sun.
How shall the burning heart of Truth be won?
Whence shall the light of revelation shine?
When shall the mind's discernment grow divine?
Where shall the soul's immortal deeds be done?
What were the incommunicable things
Whereof his dying eyes were undismayed?
What were the words that stirred his strangling breath?
Sharply the Night's impenetrable wings
Covered his eyes, and on his lips was laid
The inveterate taciturnity of Death!

XXV

O Memory, Lord of broken and broadcast
  Fragments of life, like scattered Cyclades
  Set in the dark, illimitable seas
  Of Time, still twilight-silvered and steadfast: —
Wayfarer in the devastated past,
  Ghoul of the great necropolis of Time,
  Where Life and Death and all things, in the lime
  Of long oblivion, are consumed at last: —
Salvage the shattered drift, the tempest-tossed
  Derelicts of his shipwrecked life's dead days!
  Treasure of his loved voice an echoed phrase!
And set, O Memory, in thy stagnant skies
  The Dawn reflected in his dying eyes,
  Herald of victory when all was lost!

XXVI

It is not that we loved him, as in sooth
Beyond all words we loved and love him still;
It is not that he seemed so to fulfil
Ineffably the very spirit of Truth;
It is not, day by day, in the uncouth
Brutality of death, his calm control,
Courage and tenderness of heart and soul;
It is not pity even of his mere youth; —
God knows these were alone sufficient cause!
Yet it is not for all these things that we
Now keep sure faith with things transcendent, true
And untransmissible: — it is because,
Even in the presence of the Mystery,
He knew! — it is because we knew he knew!

THE SOUL'S INHERITANCE

AND OTHER POEMS

NOTE

These poems (except the last five) were collected, arranged in their present order and prepared for publication by Mr. Lodge shortly before his death. "Ilion" was printed in Scribner's Magazine for November, 1909. "The City," "Lower New York," "We have Loathed Him, we have Loved Him," and "Sun, Moon and Stars" now appear for the first time.

THE SOUL'S INHERITANCE

Poem delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, Cambridge, 1906

I

1

Magnificent presence of the living Truth —
We know not when thy swift, serene, strong flame
Shall violate our sanctuaries of sleep!
We know not when, from carnal lethargies
And trivial pastimes and derisive dreams
Of ineffectual felicities,
Irresolutions and timidities
And temperate ambitions, we shall wake
To find our safe exclusions overborne,
The pale of our defence invaded, all
Our precincts of secure retreat destroyed;
To feel the dark enchantments yield; to hear
Thy trumpets blowing in our citadels,
The shouting of thy liege-men on the hillsides,
And in our ears thy far and forward call;
To lift at last unconquerable eyes
Suddenly to the challenge of the sunrise,
And feel thereafter always by thy light
Delivered from the mean distrust of death,
The tyranny of time, the brief content
Of all achievement and prosperity
Less than perfection, and at last resolved

To illustrate in thought and word and deed,
In life and death, the utmost that we are! —
We know not when or where or in what wise
Thou shalt appear, imperishable Truth,
Spirit of Liberty! — but well we know
That life and death are only thine adventure.
And well we know the time of revelation
Is always now — eternity is now!
The place of miracles is always here —
Infinity is here! Then here and now,
And in thy name, O latent Truth within us,
In thought and word and deed, in life and death,
Let us report and celebrate the soul!

2

Let us report and celebrate the soul,
In thought and word and deed, in life and death!
Then may we feel, perchance, the God within us,
Whose worship waits and who has slept so long,
Revive at last, athletic and superb,
Stand forth from custom, creed and circumstance,
Reclaim his high, inherent liberties,
And stem the rush of the resistless hours, —
Till, for a spacious interval, we see
The veils of darkness and deception fall
And leave us, eager of our enterprise,
Transparent to our own reality,
Against the thrilled, tremendous heart of time! . . .

Then shall it come to pass — as we report
The soul and celebrate the soul in life
And death — that hardly and mysteriously
The stubborn prison-walls of ignorance
Shall yield beneath our blind, insistent hands,
And, bruised with misadventures in the dark,
We shall achieve the soul's advance, and stand
Bathed in the light remedial, and behold
The broad, released, bright waters of the soul,
Sun-dazzled and resistless, rush away
Forever and forever to the sea! . . .

3

O to report, to celebrate the soul!
O to proclaim ourselves and all we are,
In thought and word and deed, in life and death!
O to depart, avid of explorations,
Winged and resolved, curious, in time and space —
There to retrieve the soul's inheritance,
There to report and celebrate the soul!
O to confess at last who is the Lord! —
To find at last, beyond to-day, in all
The innumerable yesterdays of time,
The onward, latent, long millenniums,
A rumour of us and a recollection! —
To learn at last that always for the soul,
In the dark earth and the deep sea, throughout
Chill ethers and the pale star multitudes,

The path leads homeward and the place is home! —
To know at last that never and nowhere
The soul is stranger, never and nowhere
Without recognizance and habitation! —
To learn, to know, to realize utterly
That time and space are phases of the soul! . . .
O let us perfectly report the soul
And celebrate the soul, until at last
No time, no space, no state is vacant of us! —
Until at last the sense revives within us
Of indissoluble identity
With sun and earth and beast, with man and God! —
Until at last, from granite, schist and shard,
From senseless jellies and brute envelopes,
We mark our stages of deliverance,
The age-long, upward levels of our flight, —
And feel the restless, resolute, firm soul,
Conscious and lord of life after so long,
Still by the insatiable impulse driven,
Transgress the forms and infidelities,
The calculations and economies,
That prove our insufficiency! — until
At last we share the ancient and divine
Companionship of peril and perfection
With all who once bore witness to the truth,
And were compounded of the celestial fire! —
Then shall we stand, central and self-assured,
To labour in the austere fraternity

Of Gods and Saviours, till our lives record,
As theirs, — our deaths, as theirs, declare the soul!
Then may we learn at last that here and now
The very light is parcelled in our vision,
Wherewith Father Prometheus disclosed
The kindled soul's transcendent regency;
That here and now, in free communion,
We break the bread of life and speak the word
Of life, as when the veiled respondents sang
Clear, at Eleusis, in the sacred gloom;
That here and now, no less for each of us,
That inward voice, cogent as revelation,
That trance of truth's sublime discovery,
Which in the soul of Socrates wrought out
Gold from the gross ore of humanity,
Still speak, still hold, still work their alchemy;
That here and now, and in the soul's advance,
And by the soul's perfection, we may feel
The thought of Buddha in our mortal brain,
The human heart of Jesus in our breast,
And in our will the strength of Herakles! . . .

4

O to report, to celebrate the soul,
Equal at last and forward with the Captains,
On the long frontiers where the twilight dies! —
There with uplifted voices that shall sound,
Sound and resound amid the loud and long

Vociferations of the embattled souls,
There to report the soul — in the broad dusk
Of hesitation, in the immeasurable
Unknown — O there to celebrate the soul!
There to resume the retrospect, to find,
Up the bright courses of the stairs of thought,
The traces of our perilous ambition!
There to endure the prospect, and, at last,
In the proud might of the soul's will, to bear
The peril as of intense emergencies,
The storm and strength as of gigantic wings,
The glare as of deep-driven lightnings, — all
The multitudinous menace of the night!
Importunate and undissuadable,
There, for the sole sake of the endless voyage,
There to stand out over the utmost verge,
Where the mist drives and the night overwhelms! . . .
There in our skies the stars of revelation;
There in our hearts the burning lamp of love;
There in our sense the rhythm and amplitude
And startled splendour of the seas of song; —
And there at last — our own infinity,
Our own eternity still unappeased! —
There, for ourselves, for freedom, truth, perfection,
There to report and celebrate the soul! . . .

II

Strangely, inviolably aloof, alone,
Once shall it hardly come to pass that we,
As with his Cross, as up his Calvary,
Burdened and blind, ascend and share his throne
And perfectly, as with our lives, atone
For the heart's triumph, for the soul's victory! —
Yet may we seem thereafter, dead as he,
To lie within life's sepulchre of stone . . .
But he is risen, the Lord is risen! — and thus,
Thus may he rise, the Lord may rise in us,
Who sleeps, who is not dead, who lives alway!
And all who come love-kindled to the tomb,
Shall find, as Mary found, an empty room,
And meet the Lord, alive and on his way! . . .

III

"I AM the Way, the Life, the Truth!" he said. —
Deep in the soul of every man alway
There is a voice that says, "I am the Way;
I am the Life, the Truth, the Living Bread!"
And whoso hearkens he is comforted:
Well he discerns the Paraclete is there,
The Soul of Truth, the Christ, the Comforter,
Who, tho' the mortal dies, is never dead.
He is within us all, whom we have sought:
The Way, the Life, the Truth, the Paraclete,
The soul, who ranges with resplendent feet,
Silent and swift, from peak to peak of thought;
He is the Lord for whom the task is wrought;
He is the Lover whom we haste to meet! . . .

IV

"Ask what you will, it shall not be denied;
Knock, and the secret door shall stand ajar;
Seek, and however much the way is far,
Yet shall the Bridegroom find, who seeks the Bride!" —
He knows how much the truth is justified,
Who is not unambitious as we are;
He finds, beyond the star we seek, a star,
Beyond our dreams, a soul unsatisfied.
He knows, and That within us more than we
Shall learn, how much we leave the best undone;
How little there is end or rest or peace;
And how the Asker and the Alms are one;
How whoso knocks brings welcome and release;
And how the search is the discovery! . . .

PILGRIMS

Poem delivered at the annual dinner of the New England Society, New York, December, 1906

I

1

Pilgrims! — The choir of their adventured days
Sounds to the living, inward ear, and tho'
Their eyes are quenched, their lips are dumb with dust,
Yet, in imperishable communion,
Clear thro' the soundless retrospect of time,
Well may our spirits now to theirs respond.
For we who, in their stead, bear up the fire,
Bear on the torch of life's inherent faith
And inconsiderate will, may well discern,
Illustrious in their lives, the Pilgrim Soul
Of Man on its eternal pilgrimage. . . .
Yes, for their deeds bear witness! Yes, for they,
Lit by some spark of the Promethean fire,
Publish their own recognizance, — afford
Proof of the Lord's dominion in his house, —
And by the old, the indefectible signs
Show how they earned their stern and splendid name!
O hearts of perished men, how shall we learn
Your secret, save as all your acts record
What angers vexed you and what loves fulfilled?

And well we know of these most arduous men,
At least, that here, across the bitter sea,
They rashly ventured into peril and exile
Not for renown or power or merchandise, —
Not for the world's remembrance or reward!
Rather they went abroad with the new Gods
Of their deliverance, for in new, clear wise
Their hearts received the old, austere, divine,
Tremendous guidance of the Cloud and Flame
Which lead the spirit out of bondage, move
Thro' waste and sea to bring the Pilgrim home.
Theirs was no profitable enterprise
Of traffic or of conquering caravels;
Rather their ships were ventured as the soul
Of man goes forth on life's storm-shadowed sea,
To find that better place where dreams come true
Of God's fresh purpose in the heart, and where
Liberty prospers in the wilderness! . . .

2

O let us now return in thought and love
To these rebellious men! — that here and now
Their stern remembrance in the House of Life
May rouse at last the Lord of Life from sleep:
Lest we grow tired and tame and temperate;
Lest we grow stable, settled and secure;
Lest we no longer hear the voice, discern
The light that made them Pilgrims; lest our minds

Scant the truth's welcome; lest our hearts forego
The labour and liberality of love;
Lest we forget that still the Pilgrimage
Fills the long prospect of the Pilgrim Soul!
We *are* the Pilgrims! — Shall we less deserve,
Than they deserved, that stern and splendid name?
Or, less than they, afford the rightful Heir
His incommensurable heritage?
Rather, as now the light of truth expands
In statelier vistas to the inward eye; —
Rather, as now, with more perfected faith
And more religious ecstasy, we learn
That life and destiny and death and time
And God and all the long captivities,
Creeds and enslavements of the mind of man,
Which tamed the heart and set, on every hand,
Brief bounds to life's insatiable hope,
Are but the myths and symbols of the spirit,
Garments outworn and mansions long outgrown; —
Therefore, as truth is merciless and just
And perfect as each one of us must be,
Inexorably and with deliberate feet
Let us of these and all dead dreams and things
Tread down the dust into the common way,
That man may liberally advance! — for thus
May we with haughtier strength and hardihood
Send forth the vagrant and victorious soul
From dreams and desolate insanities

And gross deceptions of the solid world,
Into the shining night, on to the Road! . . .
Well may we know it lies before us still,
Who are the Pilgrims, as it stretched for them
Whose pilgrimage is done! — the self-same road,
Hazardous, hard, unknown, which leads afar,
Thro' lusts and lies, thro' laws and governments,
Thro' settled customs and established creeds, —
Thro' all substantial things and sensible forms.
And well for us if we may find it out,
And walk thereon our spiritual way
Forward to real achievements and progressions, —
Pilgrims, as once they were, in high resolve
Launched on the Pilgrimage that once was theirs! . . .

II

They are gone. . . . They have all left us, one by one:
Swiftly, with undissuadable strong tread,
Cuirassed in song, with wisdom helmeted,
They are gone before us, into the dark, alone . . .
Upward their wings rush radiant to the sun;
Sea-ward the ships of their emprise are sped;
Onward their star-light of desire is shed;
Their trumpet-call is forward; — they are gone!
Let us take thought and go! — we know not why
Nor whence nor where — let us take wings and fly!
Let us take ship and sail, take heart and dare!
Let us deserve at last, as they have done,
To say of all men living and dead who share
The soul's supreme adventure, — *We* are gone! . . .

III

Let us go hence! — however dark the way,
Let us at all adventure hasten hence!
Too well we know what secret excellence,
Real and unrealized, brooks no more delay
Of who would make love perfect, and display
In life the spirit's true magnificence . . .
Haste! — lest we lose the clear, ambitious sense
Of what is ours to gain and to gainsay.
Let us go hence, lest dreadfully we die —
Die at the core of life where love is great,
Where thought is grave, audacious and serene . . .
Thither and hence all vast achievements lie,
There where the truth's transcendent virtues wait
Up the dark distance, radiant tho' unseen! . . .

IV

O GREAT departures from the thrift and care
  Of a less love, of a less truth than we
  Can hardly, in the last extremity
  Of all our powers, believe that we may share! —
Nobler prosperities, that wait us where
  We go — if we have strength and will to be
  Mariners of whatever wreck-strewn sea,
  Waifs on whatever ways shall take us there! —
O great departures! — O prosperities! —
  Ventures and consummations! — you are hence:
  Hence from the safe denials and pieties
Which life is eased and ruined and pleasured of! —
  For the strong heart conceives no bounds of love,
  The soul no measure of magnificence! . . .

LIFE IN LOVE

I

1

Clear and profound and dark as well-water,
Grave eyes transfused with gold, you were not blind; —
You were not numb, brave breathless heart of joys,
Proud heart of mercies and mysterious tears, —
You were not faithless, when the shrine lay bare
And there was splendour in the sanctuary,
As momently between us, from afar,
White thro' the mist, rose-hued as with the young
Life-blood of love's desire, soul signed to soul! . . .
You were not blind, wild eyes whose glance disclosed
Love's power and purpose which no tongue can tell;
Loosed and abandoned heart, which, swift as fire,
Seized the soul's heritage, you were not numb,
When first we saw the spirit and the source
Of life's pure essence, like a light revealed
Within us, radiant and alone; — when first
We knew the whole and best of love remained,
Sphered in the new transcendency of life
Beyond us, like a still unravished bride; —
When first we felt, in one another's arms, —
Strange and extreme to us, almost as death, —

The tragic sense of solitude; — when first
We were with love together — yet alone!
Grave eyes, brave heart, in vain, it seemed in vain
We saw, we dared, we were not faithless then,
We were not weak. — Yea, love itself seemed vain
That one first day of wonder and no words!
For, hour by hour and all the new day long,
And hour by hour and all the thrilled night thro',
And while your hands clung and your lips assured,
And while my life-blood thundered on your breast,
We were alone — together, yet alone! . . .

2

So was it shown to us as in a vision,
That day; — and once again, that sleepless night,
As in a trance we seemed to go afar
From love's inveterate violence of being,
From life's incessant uproar, and, alone,
Pause in the thrilled tranquillities of thought. . . .
There, with the pulse still rhythmic in our hearts
Of love's wild music, and the flush still warm
About us, of the senses' leaping flame,
We heard the more ineffable song — as yet
Wordless and distant to the inward ear —;
We saw the lordlier light — as yet pearl-hued
Thro' the fresh twilights which precede the dawn —;
We felt the loftier hope, the larger whole,
The lovelier rapture of that deeper sense

Of life, which of the spirit's utmost strength
Alone, — with vast completions and austere
Beginnings and perceptions clear and new,
Valid and delicate as truth must be —
Conceived in secret, is matured and born.
And then — and all at first — and in the new
Anguish of solitude — and from the far,
Still, spiritual mansion — ours at last! —,
The life we long had lived and shared appeared
Vague and fantastic thro' the friendless dark, —
As something somewhere for a little while
On the immense horizons, like a dream
On the remote and restless marge of sleep, —
Like the dull rumour and the distant flare,
To one who dwells by a deserted sea,
Of some tumultuous city on the verge. . . .
Yes! . . . we discerned, in the full, first, strange hour,
How much our lives had been a blinded sense
Of twilight, brief and brave and treacherous, —
A clashing sound of song and lamentation, —
A tragic spectacle of men and things
Innumerable and hurried and estranged,
And all phantasmal, and remote to us,
And insignificant, — like some confused
And shouted tidings, borne by false reports
And faithless messengers, to where the Lord
Still in dark chambers stayed and slept unknown. . . .
Then, with a deeper meaning, beautiful

And tender, in our hearts revived once more
Love, and the free hilarities of all
The young earth-children in the rain-swept Spring,
And the tremendous tears that rise like rain
Blown from the dark, unplumbed, adventurous seas
Of spiritual solitude — to fall
Like a confession in the dust of death. . . .
And then — and then — as wonderfully we
Received the secret, and our sight, at last,
Cleared with the vigil, and our hearts grew calm, —
Turning, we saw in one another's eyes,
Silent as star-light, silver-clear as song,
The light from peak to peak beacon afar
Thro' darkness . . . , and our hearts kindled anew,
And love matured and strengthened to endure
The labour and achieve the heritage. . . .

3

For then not yours alone and mine alone, —
Darling, we knew at last! — but ours and love's
Was the supreme and sacred best — the soul's
Perfect inheritance; and hand in hand,
Ambitiously, we took the high resolve:
Knowing no beauty of our lives was lost,
No passion scanted, no desire, no joy,
Withered or dispossessed, if all, at last,
Was with the one perfection kindled thro', —
If, for love's pleasure and communion,

Spirit and sense and heart and mind together,
Inseparable and single, all at once
Thrilled to the deeper sense of life, and proved
All valid, all victorious, all redeemed! . . .
Then haste was in our hearts lest we should live
Leaving the best unshared — lest we should die
Dreadfully twain, before the task was done! . . .
"Haste! There is haste," we cried, "for time is now
And brief; and love's far prospect goes away
Down the free high-road of the perfect quest . . .
And it may well be long! . . ." — Yes! long indeed,
We thought — who knew how much the heart is frail,
How dark the venture and how far the goal —,
Well may it be, in truth it shall be long,
It shall be gradual and austere to bring
The wild wild love into the soul's dominion;
It shall be strange and splendid to prepare
The House of song and fire and festival,
His House at last, his lord-ship, for the Lord;
It shall be wholly arduous and divine
And feasible to lock the lips of Pan
With the tremendous silences of truth,
And task his strong lascivious limbs with toil:
To force true service from the ancient foe,
And lay strict burdens on the winged steed;
And it shall be a triumph and ecstasy
To drive love's lightnings up the sullen night, —
To fashion of the fire that lurks and leaps

And sings and kindles in the source of life
A lamp to guide us in the spirit's peril! . . .
So, in life's haste and in love's jeopardy,
Were we resolved, however hard and long
It well might be, and we however weak,
To lay, with hands of longing and control,
The soul's strong harness on the mighty beast,
So he might labour for us — until at last
We, of his strength, were lifted and unbound . . .

4

Soft, sombre hair — strange sweetness of my Love —
Clear, rose-pale, sensuous lips, and white, small breasts
Set spaciously asunder —, not in vain,
Not for the moment's rapture are you fair!
Deeper than life, and nobler far than joy,
In you previsioned, may the mind discern,
The heart receive interpretations — signs
Soon to reveal the secret —, as we stand,
Like exiles who return from very far,
Where the calm light lies warm along the threshold,
And the soul's silence in the shining house
Welcomes with love the glad wayfarer home! . . .
Home — to the soul! My Darling — now, indeed,
More than the promise is fulfilled, we know! . . .
For we have been, in many a night and day,
Perfect to one another; we have loved,
And felt the imperishable hours bring forth

Beauty, and delicate intensities
And amplitudes of being, and liberties,
And rapt persuasions of the living truth. . . .
And we have lived and loved by noon and night,
Seeming transfigured . . .; and the loveliness
Of earth and sea and sky has been to us
More spacious and sublime — a more serene
And spiritual rapture! . . . Yes! — and life
Is, in its sensuous strength, a sacred thing
To us; and all its large hilarities,
Flushed youth and sexual impulse in the blood,
The flowing and abundant natural heart's
Affections, and the mind's far gyres of thought,
Yield to the spirit and the finer sense
And understanding, patiently matured,
And stedfast longing and adventurous mind,
Treasures of theirs beyond our partial dreams . . .
Home, to the soul! . . . My Darling, still and still
The quest is ours — the quest, in sense and soul! . . .
Still is the way before us, and the power
Within us, and the longing unassuaged, —
Darling! — and still between us life and love! . . .

II

That day we saw the sunlight dawn and die,
The twilight close, the dusk grow deep and still,
The red moon rise, the white moon climb the hill,
And darkness fill the caverns of the sky . . .
That night we saw the storm-strewn beaches lie
Endless and pale, the midnight stare with stars,
The ocean flash like countless scimitars, —
And felt the feet of time go soundless by . . .
That day! That night! — We saw the harvest rise,
Of truth's immortal seed, and yield its grain,
Where thro' the soul's starved acres love had passed . . .
We were like mariners whose sleepless eyes
Have sought on each horizon's verge in vain
Their landfall — and who come to port at last! . . .

III

That day love stood like sunrise at the goal;
The labyrinth of life seemed filled with light;
And, as we passed, a splendour calm and bright
Wreathed for the brows of death an aureole.
Swiftly, we saw dissolve from pole to pole
Wide gyres of indistinguishable night,
Till, grave with raptures of austere delight,
We stood in the vast day-break of the soul! . . .
Then, as in memory's spectral afterglow,
Life seemed a rumour of far things, a tale
Told in a ghostly twilight, long ago . . .
And Love, whose guidance we had shared so long,
Paused on the verge of death's inviolate pale
With lips of silence and with eyes of song . . .

IV

That night of spiritual silences
We found love's inmost silence, where the days
Are silent, where the perishable phrase
Of song is silent, and where silence is
Like light along majestic distances
Opened before the soul's unswerving gaze . . .
Where life is silent, and the blatant ways
Of life, and life's divine uncertainties . . .
There we beheld the dark enigmas yield
In silence, and in silence truth appear,
Stainless as star-light on a silver shield . . .
And still we felt, as in transcendent skies
Beyond the mind's last outpost, calm and clear,
Silence and glittering tranquillities. . . .

LOVE IN LIFE

I

Beauty and Truth are like a stedfast shore
Bathed in tranquillities of boundless light;
Veiled in the stainless garments of the night,
Gemmed with the glory of eternal stars;
And there, enisled above the reach and roar
And windy wreck of Time's abysmal sea,
Life, like Odysseus worn with works and wars,
Love, like the Nymph Kalypso, half-divine,
Meet and commune, transfuse and intertwine,
Thro' mortal hours of immortality. . . .
So has it been for us — as it shall be
Still and hereafter so! But now, once more, —
Now, while the powers of life and love are whole
And perfect to their inmost core, —
Now, one by one and all inexorably
The imperishable hours are spent,
The hours of new, renewed abandonment,
Of life's surrender, soul and sense,
Of love's possession, sense and soul;
And while our spirits yield and yearn,
And while the heart lies naked still
And still the fain, flushed senses thrill,
The swift and ceaseless tides return

To bear life's restless venture hence. . . .
Now, therefore — now, Beloved — my Darling, now
While still the golden and transparent glow
Of the inextinguishable desire
Colours thy pale and perfumed loveliness, —
Now while love's assignation still is sweet
In the high, bridal mansions of the heart, —
Veiled and voluptuous and discreet,
With eyes still open to their depths of fire,
Still rash, still languid with love's long caress,
Once more, with me, Beloved, rise up, depart! —
Once more,
Pass from the shadowed door! . . .

Winged with the Spirit; robed in light and song
Born of the purest ecstasies which throng
The unutterable heart transfused with love;
Let us return, transfigured from above,
As thro' love's lingering sunset's golden haze
To life's familiar, tried and transient ways. . . .
Let us, as many a time before,
Together, while the great lights wane,
Traverse the sombre corridor,
And by the steep, dark, silent stair
Descend together from the secret room
Where, thinly, in the perfumed air,
Pale thro' the curtained window-pane,
The veiled light falls along the breathing bed. . . .

While quietly overhead
Round the low, narrow cornice grows the gloom. . . .
Let us return! This hour of life is dead:
Love and the Truth's eternities remain!
Hither and hence the ways of love are sane,
Splendid and sane and secret to the end!
Therefore with Love, as freely with a friend,
Hence from the heart's invincible regency,
From sanctuary,
From this clear Eden, this sequestered place,
The breathless, long desire, the brief embrace,
The eyes that lighten and the lips that burn,
Let us return! . . .

Life sounds its thunder-call! —
Fearless, Beloved, as lovers let us go,
Radiant with love's resplendent after-glow,
Down from the garden and the festival;
Down from the pleasaunce and the shadowed wall;
Down from the vineyard by the shining shore;
Down to the storm-swept stream of life once more!
Come! — for our lives shall not be less,
Since Love goes with us side by side,
Borne forth on Time's tremendous tide,
Than in this Paradise of love's excess
And incommunicable happiness. . . .
Therefore, receptive, ardent, bold,
Let us go down, go forth, and fare:

As, garmented in sunset-gold,
Winged with the midnight's moonless air,
Hazardous men go down in ships
To the inhospitable seas. . . .
Swift and responsive on our lips,
Life's large hilarities resound;
Clear in our eyes and hearts abound
The light no loveless vision sees,
The joy no loveless heart can share;
And, in the rumouring street below,
Life's human currents rise and flow —
Whither or whence we neither know nor care!
Only our hearts rejoice as now we go —
Lovers, alone, together — down,
This first of nightfall, to the sleepless town,
The streaming thoroughfare! . . .
O my Beloved, how sweet it is,
How dear and human, strange and sweet,
Free and afoot a night like this,
To wander forth; to feel again
The mighty murmur and multitude of men;
To see, in fire and smoke, the street,
Strident as Hell's remorseless gorge,
Furious with faces, disappear
Between the endless lamps alight,
Into the sunset flaming like a forge! —
While, interfused with the gold atmosphere,
Quietly falls, this end of afternoon,

The grey, great shadow of night,
Whereunder shines the round, red, murky moon,
Like a low lantern, watchful and withheld
Under the cloak of a conspirator . . .
The street is like a flaring corridor
In some fantastic, harlot's house of song
And wine and women and wantonness and wrong! . . .
And sweet it is to understand
The rash desire, the thrilled delight,
And by the restless charm compelled
To feel our eager lives impelled
With life's strong stream, and hand in hand
To wander in the lessening light. . . .
O sweet it is, O wild and sweet,
To feel the young heart's vagrancies
Resume dominion! — while the night comes down,
Dressed in her smoke-begrimed, star-spangled gown,
Like a procuress, witching, old and wise:
The silent, sinister, discreet
Accomplice of the brawling, bawdy street,
Who shelters and secludes from sight
The dreams, desires and deeds that shrink from light —
Exquisite, rash, lascivious privacies;
The eyes of lust, the virgin's startled eyes;
The assassin's knife, the victim's broken breath;
The pain of poverty, disease and death; —
The heart's supreme, inviolate secrecies! . . .

Yea, Love — how free, how intimate, how sweet,
How vagrant and voluptuous, arm in arm,
At dark to wander in the city street! —
As lovers whose desires fulfil
Of life and love the secret will,
To pass, to pause, to swiftly lean
In shadowed porticoes, to kiss
With wilful lips, abandoned, eager, warm;
With eyes unseeing and hands that clasp unseen; —
To share our secret, and because of this
Feel our two lives miraculously one,
Our hearts disclosed in rapt communion! . . .
O Love, how sweet to fold our solitude
About us like a mantle, and pass on
Loved and companioned thro' the multitude! . . .
How sweet to have no heed or care
Whither we go or whence we come,
Since truth is ours to do and dare,
And all the labyrinthine ways
Of human life are the soul's thoroughfare,
And all the spacious nights and flowing days
Are as pavilions where the heart goes home
To love — the perfect love we share!
The soul is here, the soul is there;
Hither or hence the heart is fain;
The truth is hard and high and sane
In every time and everywhere:
And we as lovers well may feel

The lustrous eyes of love reveal
The free, unutterable, just
And secret spiritual trust
That truth is possible, that we
Shall yet be perfect as we must!
Love dares not dream of less than this;
No less can life believe or be;
The smiles and frowns of Lachesis,
Who sits with fortune on her knee,
Are to the spirit vain and vile.
For always, when and where we are, —
Here in the street where mile on mile,
In hope and fear, the captives press;
There in the sacred, secret room
Where life is love's and loveliness, —
The human soul's transcendent doom
Is ours alone to make or mar!
Ourselves are all, and all we know:
And therefore, strictly as the cost
Of life to us is high or low,
The game is won, the game is lost;
Since always by how much we give
Of life and love and thought and power and faith,
By so much and no less we love and live,
Find and possess the soul,
And, reassured of life, confront the goal,
Fearful of no betrayal after death. . . .

Darling — the street is endless . . . and the night
Eternal . . . and the sacred, secret room
Is always furnished in the heart and fair! —
Love's bridal chamber is adorned, and there
The Paranymph, arrayed in golden light,
Waits for the Bridegroom in the quiet gloom. . . .
Still in the bridal chamber — still alone,
The Bridegroom and the Paranymph — with love,
With life and love together: — even so
Let us begone! — and we are gone, and go
Into the street . . . into the night . . .
Where the stars rise and life's dark waters flow . . .
Where, gyre on gyre and row on row,
Shine, inextinguishably bright,
The lamps that Truth, the eternal Lamplighter,
Kindles above
The brawling, bawdy street of life,
To guide the spiritual Wayfarer . . .
Lovers we are! As lovers going home, —
Home to the heart with love's high secret rife;
Home to the spirit's thrilled eternity; —
Come, let us go! The best is ours to be!
Body and soul together, Darling, come! . . .

II

I saw her shining garments cling
Around her like a moon-lit mist;
Her eyes were clear as amethyst;
Her hair was like a sea-bird's wing
Dark in the gold of evening;
And in the hushed room's narrow space
The light lay mild across her face:
She seemed as one about to sing. . . .
She sang not — and without a stir
Time passed between us; and the light
Abounded, and the strength of love:
The light, the life, the strength whereof
The truth is nurtured . . . while the night
Darkened and the stars lightened over her. . . .

III

Her voice is pure and grave as song;
Her lips are flushed as sunset skies;
The power, the myth, the mysteries
Of life and death in silence throng
The secret of her silences;
Her face is sumptuous and strong,
And twilights far within prolong
The spacious glory of her eyes.
Her heart is like a place of power,
A pale of peace, a precinct of
Passion and all-consuming love . . .
Her thought is like a lofty tower;
Her soul is like a Bride therein,
Whom only truth and love shall win.

IV

I saw her sandals of grave gold
Move on the marble, soft as light;
Her motion was like birds in flight;
The bountiful, the new, the old
Deep secret that no tongue has told
Was born of her — as is the white
First flame of day-break from the night,
As song-birds wake, as flowers unfold.
And then I kissed her sandals of
Grave gold, and kissed her hands and mouth;
And knew how more serene than song,
How spacious and how strong is Love! —
Spacious as thought is of the truth;
Strong as the conscious soul is strong! . . .

UNISON

I

1

Thronged with the unpetitionable truth,
Which from the love-surrendered and one heart
Shone in the spirit's starred tranquillity,
Hued with deep light the soaring wings of song,
And thro' the labyrinthine flesh transfused,
Subtile as fire, the elemental blood,
We felt the indefectible prodigy
Of life respond to our prodigious lives,
While, with an eye new-opened to discern
Meaning and revelation, we beheld
The immemorial loveliness of earth! . . .
The mountain rose in power beneath our feet,
Vestured in basalt and the endless grass;
Crested with forest swelled the distant hills,
Whence towering unalterable amid
Spacious serenities of sky and sun
Rose the ranged peaks of naked stone. . . . Below,
Gold lightnings kindled on the leaping stream,
And over nurtured fields and pasturage
Coloured new harvests and perennial bloom, —
While over all, like benediction, lay

Calm azure of the immeasurable skies
And stintless gold of the down-pouring sun! . . .
And we, in that exceeding hour, were not
Passionless or insensible! The voice
Of the united being of the world,
Life's unison and love's antiphonal,
Sang like an ocean to the inward ear;
Beneath earth's bridal garments, gemmed with light,
Enwreathed with flowers, and perfumed with the faint
Measureless motion of sun-sweetened airs,
The invariable beauty, like the clear
Transfiguration of a dream, appeared
To the dazed vision of the inward eye, —
While in the spirit and the sense we took
Our lover's will of the consenting bride! . . .
Thus to our eager and initiate sense —
In love and the sole spirit's truth conjoined, —
Yielding her violated privacies,
Nature revealed her nuptial nakedness;
And we, against our human breast of love,
Held the one heart of life, and felt our hearts,
Filled with its mighty pulse, thunder to song! . . .
So, in the mind's resolvent unity,
All powers and phases of the natural world
Showed the one urge within, and we discerned
In the rich tissue of apparent things
The secret sense which is not theirs but ours; —
So, of the sunlight and the mystic dust,

The flowering hills, the open face of heaven,
We phrased the full heart's wordless harmonies; —
And so, to us, in liberty and light,
Seemed the scarped summits of abiding stone
Like the pure pinnacles of thought that rise
In the clear aether of the mind's starred heaven! . . .

2

O life's exceeding hour of strength and grace,
Of gentleness and passion, when, like gods,
We walked in native virtue, and, at ease,
Fashioned in beauty our apparent lives! —
When, interfused, the heart's persuasive trust,
In spirit and the enraptured sense contrived
Of our two beings one communion,
And life's ephemeral metamorphoses
Yielded their secret and were one and ours! . . .
Then was it well with us! — and so, in truth,
So is it always with us, if we knew! —
So are we always kinsmen of the sod
And leagued with skies and mountains! Truth is one
In the wide purpose of the spirit's life;
And love's fount flows forever! . . . And so it is
That when at last the liberated heart,
With love or the rapt spirit's strength fulfilled,
Gives what so long its senseless thrift withheld,
We feel the mind's immortal pregnancies
Come perfectly to birth, and haply see,

Clear in the freshening light, the pure gold's gleam
Shine in the spirit's inmost treasuries! . . .
And so are we delivered! . . . So it is,
As by the wind of loosed, uplifted wings
Or the strong, tender touch of a loved hand,
On secret chambers of the heart and mind
Some unsuspected door is set ajar,
And all at once we feel the thrill and tone
Of a great music, and the lyric cry
Of phrased, puissant voices, sweet with song,
Where, in life's holiest sanctuary, unknown,
Unsought, inviolable, Olympian,
The grave Gods feast together, and take no wrong
Of the frail, feeble things we are and do!
And thus — Yea, thus indeed — thus perfectly —
We are advised how dull we are and blind;
How with contracted powers our lives are waste;
How we are bound like slaves, like victims scourged;
And how in shame, damnation and defeat
The brief times of our being are passed away,
Which well might be, in each momentous hour,
Valid with victory and phrased in song,
Fragrant with love, and with the natural truth
Of the pure spirit freed and sanctified —
As one exceeding hour was once to us: —
To us who were, from love-surrendered hearts,
Thronged with the unpetitionable truth! . . .

II

Breathless and unforeseen, it comes! — the hour
When, on the breast of the Beloved, we feel
Almost the secret sense of life reveal
Its meaning, and the source of life its power; —
When, as in some vast sunrise, like a flower,
Our soul stands open and our eyes unseal,
While all that fear and ignorance conceal
Seems in perfection life's predestined dower.
Then, as it were against the inward ear,
We hold in silence, like a chambered shell,
The dazed one human heart . . . and seem to hear
Forever and forever rise and swell
And fail and fall on Death's eventual shore,
Tragic and vast, life's inarticulate roar! . . .

III

Love gave us sanctuary! — and sense and speech
Of what we were at last, at most, at best;
Love gave us strength and faith to manifest
The soul's majestic virtues each to each.
We learned from love, what love alone can teach,
How love is dying in hearts that long for rest;
Love showed us how man's life is lordliest;
Love put the stars of thought within our reach . . .
Love gave us guidance, and our right of way
Into his Paradise: and there, alone,
We were with love together day by day;
Till we, in silence, breathless at the goal,
Free of each other, burned and blent to one,
Shared the last loneliest secret of the soul. . . .

IV

Earth, sea and sky are not as once they were
To us: there is no aspect of all things,
No pulse of heart or brain, no whisperings
Of truth's grave music to the inward ear,
Unaltered or unglorified: the mere
Being of life, intense as song-swept strings,
Is like a breathless sense of soaring wings
Loosed in the spirit's boundless atmosphere! . . .
We are not as we were! Our feet have ranged
The summits of imperishable hours;
Life is a lordlier hope; and we, estranged
In secret and at heart from all control,
Walk in the wide new futures of the soul,
Charged as with incommensurable powers! . . .

STRENGTH AND SOLITUDE

I

1

Sun, moon and stars — inviolate firmament —
Phases of earth's inveterate alchemy
Of life and death — profound tranquillities,
Thunders and trepidations of the sea —
How often have you been to man in spirit
A liberation and an ecstasy!
How often has the soul gone forth with you,
As, with the tide, a stranded caravel
Issues by noble estuaries, impelled
By streaming winds and led by the low sun,
Into the light, into the infinite spaces! . . .
How often has the majesty and silence
Of starlight, or the clear crying of birds
At dawn, or the vast violet skies of evening,
Befriended us with spacious influences,
Composed the mind in quiet exaltation,
And, thro' the shining fabric of the soul's
Inconstant vision of eternal things,
Strained and refined the clouded wine of life!
How often has the sound and spectacle
And splendour of the universal being

Affected and admonished us to know
In all the common ways and days of life
The immanence of spiritual rapture;
And given us liberty at last to learn
What correspondence and complicities
Involve the soul with sun and moon and stars,
With sky and earth and sea and countless forms,
Passions and appetites and dissolutions,
Powers and faiths and pregnancies of life!

2

We have laid down our ear to the dumb sod —
We who are man and mortal as all things,
And more and yet not otherwise than they —
We have laid down our ear and heard the earth
Of graves and the innumerable grass
Whisper to us . . . and we have heard the sea,
Delicate and enormous, shout aloud
And murmur in the midnight and the moonrise
Vastly and with a tired and tragic voice. . . .
And we have heard the sunrise singing like
A lyre of gold, and clear and faint and far,
Star-choirs in the cosmic atmospheres! . . .
And, hearing, we have caught out of the one
Immeasurable voice from every hand
Our own soul's secret, — we have felt, when all
Our whole life's strength seemed one, and all our heart
Was of one ecstasy, within ourselves

These diverse voices blent into one tone
Of the one Truth, one phrase of the one Song
Everywhere singing for our audience! . . .
Yea, and of all this music of all things,
Surely we too, hearing, and very fain
Of the full import, which is ours, may yet
At last, at least — if nothing more — discern
How much and ever and all in all the soul
Is everywhere for everyone of us
Immediate and importunate! — how much,
In the pure purpose of the heart, the proud
Desire of the indomitable mind, —
Tho' the shrill chatter of our wasting lives
Leaves us at last weak love and spent resolve —
The truth is arduous and discoverable! —
And O how much on every hand, how much,
When the rare hour of sight and insight comes, —
Tho' it reveal to us how we are not
At best empowered and daring for great deeds, —
The broadcast very light of liberation
Flares in the narrow vistas of our vision,
Shines in the windows of our prison-house,
Flushed and persuasive and unquenchable! . . .
O let us hear and see and feel and know
That nature, which is ours, that even we,
We too, whose lives have left their utmost strength
Unused, — we too, who have not truly known
Nor arduously doubted, but instead

Basely believed what seemed and was not true,
May yet, at last, for the soul's sake, discern
How all the meaning and the mystery
Go hand in hand and commonly along
The thronged and trampled avenues of life
And death, — how always and how much,
Whether in nature's elemental being,
Whether in labours of the lonely mind,
Whether in love fulfilled, or life's gross toil
And long-deferred perfection, by the soul
We are invaded and possessed and graced!
O let us, to the body and blood of life,
And to the heart and soul of what we are,
So animate and kindle that at last,
Welcomed, restored, reminded to ourselves,
We too may seem to pass beyond the veil,
Threadbare with light, — beyond the place of passions,
And, on the threshold of the Sanctuary,
Hear the last questions answered in the silence! . . .

3

Yet, in that very moment when we dream
Of the soul's inmost self as one fulfilled,
Full well we know the end is not, — nor is there
Ever an end more absolute than now!
There is a strength and solitude within us
That will not let us rest! . . . and well we know

That freshly and forever they shall return,
The unanswered question and the pregnant doubt;
And we, have we the passion and the power,
We shall emerge from where we entered in,
Deeming the goal was near, and pass beyond —
There to discern perfections unachieved,
There to reanimate to truths unknown
And liberties we dare not specify! . . .
Had we the strength! — Have we perhaps the strength,
Who have all else beside? Are we not men?
Is not the Universe our dwelling-place?
And therefore perfectly in truth for us
Is not the utmost wholly possible? . . .
O, with the baffled and the resolute
Vanguard of liberal humanity, —
O to so purge our lives of the mild hours,
Our hearts of humble longings and meek hopes,
Our minds of customs and credulities,
That we may find the days wholly fulfilled
And lightened of the Spirit — all the days
And all things and ourselves, rich and revealed
In the majestic meanings and the might
And passion and pure purpose of the soul! . . .
O to be with Them — with their lives who lived
In truth, and with their hearts which knew no ease,
And with their souls which could not be denied! . . .
O to be with Them! — Let us be with Them!
Yea, we are more sufficient than we seem,

We who stand out in the forefront of time,
Last of the living generations, set
With sleepless eyes on the last verge of thought. . . .
For we alone, bravely and all in all,
We have usurped God's ancient heritage:
And where He died we hear a single voice
Of one who wakes into the world's dominion —
Our own voice singing where His choirs are mute:
A voice of challenge and of celebration;
A voice of love, puissant and serene;
A voice that rings up the long road, and breaks,
Where the Night closes like a dead man's lips,
The inert, dark, dreadful taciturnities. . . .
A voice which the sad silence of spent things
Out of the Past, — which all the harsh and high
Clamour of life's huge process in the world,
Threatens, it may be, but shall not subdue
In anyone of all the least of us,
If we but rouse in our whole living strength,
As Jesus, once, and Socrates, to dare
And live and doubt and die for the sole Truth! . . .

II

Thought's holy place is like a sepulchre;
The wine of love's communion cup is spilled;
The House of Life is like a tavern filled
With harlots, slaves and strangers, and the stir
Of dancing feet before the flute-player,
Of shallow voices shrill and counterfeit:
And there the smoky lamps of lust are lit,
And faith is frail, and truth is sinister . . .
Yet, in the sacred chambers of the mind,
He lies as in his grave who is the Lord . . .
No rumours vex him, and his eyes are blind
As death, and he is dead — like Lazarus!
What Christ shall resurrect him with a word? . . .
What Saviour bring him back to being thus? . . .

III

We, who are spent with weakness, wrath and lust;
We, who endure such vile captivities;
We, who descend by desolate degrees
The steep dark way, till dust returns to dust; —
We, who are pure, exalted and august;
We, who are Jesus, who are Socrates,
Who are compact of sacred mysteries,
Who are the very soul, loving and just: —
Sheltered in life's deserted House, we seem
Abject and senseless, like poor beasts who lair
In some vast palace where death's darkness creeps
Silently down to where we crouch, from where,
Perfect and solitary and supreme,
Heedless and motionless, the Master sleeps. . . .

IV

Truly there is no law but truth; there is
No judge but justice. They who use the sword
Shall perish by the sword, for no reward
Is there but virtue, nor shall evil miss
The strict revenge of its calamities,
Since in and of ourselves, perforce, are scored
Exact effects for every deed and word, —
Nor life, nor death forego the least of this!
Nothing effects our destinies save we:
Ours is the seed we sow, the fruit we reap —
Yea, and the heart's one flame of ecstasy,
And the soul's vigil we are sworn to keep,
And life's low average of strife and sleep,
And, O, the best we are and dare not be! . . .

THE NOCTAMBULIST

I

That night of tempest and tremendous gloom,
Across the table, for (it seemed to us)
An age of silence, in the dim-lit room,
Tenantless of all humans save ourselves,
Yet seeming haunted, as old taverns are,
With the spent mirth of unremembered men, —
He mused at us. . . . And then, "I know! . . ." he said,
"I know! . . . O Youth! . . . I too have seen the world
At sunrise, candid as the candid dew;
And felt, responsive to the cosmic life,
My senses kindle and my veins abound, —
My life leap forward like an eager flame!
I know! . . . It all returns to thrill me thro'
To-night: — how much upon the virgin mind
Often the truth lies lettered plain and large,
When, on the face of things, the flushed new sense
Finds revelations which our faith receives,
Till the whole meaning, from the spectacle
Of earth and sea and sky, — our hearts attuned, —
Smiles out under the sun! I know to-night —
Catching your eyes beyond the candle-flame —

With joy, and not without a kind of sad
Compassion, and the weariness of one
Who has been all the rounds of repetition,
How much you take it all for granted! Yes! . . .
And that's perhaps prosperity, as you
Esteem it — chiming in your singing tones
With the world's coarse appraisal. Now, at least,
You feel man's life sufficient, and your strength
Surpassing the whole task! You look abroad,
And see the new adventure wait for you,
Splendid with wars and victories; — for you
Trust the masqued face of Destiny. But I —
I've turned the Cosmos inside out!" he said;
And on his lips the shadow of a smile
Looked hardly human: " . . . Inside out!" he said.
And we said nothing; we discerned a vague,
Certain and incommunicable sense
That we, in his inscrutable regard,
Were but as phases of some general dark,
In which his life was spent, staring for stars. . . .
Then we remembered how it sometimes chanced
That he would sit and talk, over his wine,
Of his adventures; so we held our peace,
And saw the candle-flame burn up before
His solitary eyes, and could not smile
At recollection of his trivial phrase,
As still he smiled, — till, "I have been," he said,
"Since I was young like you — as once I was! —

Round and about this little, day-lit world,
And drained its springs of wisdom! — And to you,
Who'll not believe me, — since no man is spared
His journey round the world, and from the Springs
No drop can pass to quench another's thirst, —
I'll tell the ancient, ill-considered truth:
Wisdom's a shallow source, and all the world
Is near and small! Yes! the one soul within
Contains them all and yearns unsatisfied! . . .
Yet, I believe, you realize, at the least,
That ignorance can only be the bliss
Of fools, and fools — Well, you are not so tame!
You'll make the journey, — for at last by these
Peripatetics one may chance to learn
What knowledge is, — and then — and then — at last
Bounding the Lord's domain on every hand, —
As here the unconquered darkness circumscribes
Our candle's humble regency of light, —
There are the Frontiers!" In his eyes there shone
Perilous ecstasies. . . . He paused; and we
Saw the mild radiance slumber in his wine,
Sweet as stored sun-light from the vine-clad hills,
And felt our hearts beat high, as tho' we shared
His solitude, and in the ambient dark
Stared with his star-lit vision. . . . "Yes," he said,
"There are the frontiers, — far for you, and near
About me hour by hour; and all between
Is the old, same adventure of the mind,

Seeking, with no suspicion how the end
Will cheat its longing and deride its hope,
Ever its long-accumulating spoil,
Its hard-won, hazardous inheritance.
Yes! — I have stood in the beginning, where
You stand; and gone the journey you shall go;
Wrought the same tasks, and battled with the Gods —
As all we must! — and loved, as all we may,
With the old, pagan ecstasy! My sense
Was not less foolish nor less keen than yours
Of freedom measured as my will should choose:
So, in my scorn and strength and pride, I chose —
Heedless of all save just the mind's conceived
Perfection, and the heart's imagined best —
Life's lordliest liberties: — chose Love — chose
Truth —
Chose to respond in all my works and days
To powers transcendent, which I knew not of! . . .
So, witless, wilful, wonder-struck with life,
I captained all my voyage with ambition
Nothing could satiate — as the failure proves!
Yes, I was young, I grant you! — Ah, but what
If now, despite all wisdom and the years,
Youth's first resolve, in life and spirit still
Held stedfast unto death? I ask you, then
Might not the heart within me, greatly glad, —
Almost with pride, as one who sees the gold
Of day-break glinting in his sunset skies, —

Revive its by-gones? Yes! I feel anew —
The young heart's blood afire in every vein —
What love was once (who know what love can be
To the whole man matured!), when I — I too,
Flame-fed with passion in the moonless night,
Watched to descry one casement thrust aside,
To hear one voice make music of my name;
Or felt the silken whisper of one robe,
The beating of one heart, one eager tread
Come to my assignation in the dusk! . . .
Yes! . . . and I feel anew the splendid zest
Of youth's brave service in truth's ancient cause, —
When, with the self-same thunders that you use,
Edged with a wit — at no time Greek! — I too
Most pleasurably assailed and tumbled down,
With a fine sense of conquest and release,
The poor, one, old, enfeebled, cheerless God
Left to us of our much be-Deitied
And more be-Devilled past! And much beside
I well recall; and if I smile, it is
The smile we give to children — not in scorn!
Rather be sure I know there are those things
We do in youth, and may not choose but do:
Old battles fought again, old voyages
Renewed, and old discoveries re-made,
And much brave marching in well-trodden ways, —
All with a freshness beautifully ours!
Youth has its spacious leisures, when the brave,

Superfluous, necessary things are done;
When worlds are conquered; when the old vain Gods
Must fall again; when in the very face
Of multitudes we revolutionize!
And all's well done, I doubt not; — tho' the times
Of life may well seem all too brief to waste!
But this comes later, when — we learn! — as learn
We must, if we go forward still from strength
To strength incessantly, — to wage no more
With phantoms of the past fortunate wars;
To die no longer on the barricades
For the true faith; to spend no more the rich
And insufficient days and powers of life
Striving to shape the world and force the facts,
Tame the strong heart and stultify the soul,
To fit some creed, some purpose, some design
Ingeniously contrived to spare the weak,
Protect the timid and delude the fools, —
Who feel no deep, inspired response to life's
Whole power and peril; — and to beautify
By nice discrimination, — to explain
By phrase and fraud and fancy, — to reform
By dint of gross damnations and a most
Robust stupidity! The time must come
When we can deal in partialities
No more, if truth shall prosper: for we stand
Awfully face to face with just the whole
Secret — our unrestricted Universe,

Spirit and sense! . . . And then, abruptly then,
Swift as a passion, brutal as a blow,
The Dark shuts down! . . . and, desolate amid
Fair ruined dreams and strangled ecstasies
And lights we saw as stars, suddenly quenched,
We stand upon the Frontiers, and confront
The illimitable Night! . . . And, O, the truth
Is terrible within us! — for at last
We touch our bounds — we fill, in every gyre,
In all its pearly mansions, wondrously,
Up from what blind beginnings, long-evolved —
The unfinished shell of our humanity;
And feel the sunless, soulless, shoreless sea
Immeasurably about us . . . and we know —
Walled round and prisoned in the senseless dark —
How little we are free! . . ." He smiled no more.
His lean hands closed together, and the light
Waned in the silence like a dying song. . . .
Our minds seemed sleepless as a star, our hearts
Yearned to his meaning, and our eyes discerned
The plain lights lessen and his face grow far. . . .
Then, as it seemed out of the dark, he said —
"The Night is best! — for only when we fill
The total measure of our human ken,
And feel in every exercise of being
The bondage of our fixed infirmities,
Are we assured that we, in every cell
And nerve, respond to all life's whole appeal,

Known and unknown, in sense and heart and brain;
And, utterly at last in unison, —
Beast, man and God, their several strengths as one, —
Meet the whole issue as a true whole man!
Only the Night is best — the Night wherein
Our eyes, long-used and wearied with the gross
World's inconsiderable spectacle,
Grow spacious, and, no longer blind with sun,
See, in the incommensurable dark,
Sudden as song, above, beyond us — stars! . . ."
He paused; and then, across the table's space,
Gazed, as it were to fix us, each in turn;
And, with a smile that failed to cheer us, said —
"I'm a Noctambulist! — for in the Dark
Journeys are endless; and the virtue is
Of life's pure essence, which we term the soul,
To find small profit in appointed ends,
And weary of a measurable world.
My feet have tried all paths that man has trod,
And all lead out thro' twilights, and beyond,
Where man has never trod — and where I go! . . .
And life and love and death and thought and truth
Seem strange and new to me, — who yet have been
Round and about this little, day-lit world,
And drained its springs of wisdom, — as to you
They do not seem, in youth's fresh hour of faith!
For the reality is all my care!
Little I heed, in splendour or dismay,

How men perambulate their common streets,
Drifted and driven, caused and causeless things;
Or drench the highways of their huddled march —
Forced by essential powers they only serve —
With sweat and blood and tears. They go their rounds,
Caged and constricted, forced and overborne,
And all unconscious of their servitude
And dark confinements, — helpless, pitiable
And insignificant; yet all their boast
Is freedom, and their faith is liberty.
But he alone is free — at least in some
Measure he may be free! — who takes the Dark's
Uncharted venture with a homeless eye! . . ."
In the strict silence while he spoke no more
We heard the tumult of our hearts, and feared
Almost as men fear death, and knew not why
We feared . . . until at last, while at the closed
Windows the wind cried like a frenzied soul,
He said, "I too have tried, of mortal life,
The daily brief excursions! Now I watch
You turn and turn in the same beaten track
Of brief desires and strict necessities,
While from the thronged vast circus round about
Stare down upon you all the eyes of the world
Which crowns the victor and the vanquished scorns!
And thus, or well or ill, you run your race,
Going no-whither tho' the prize be won . . .
I know! — I ran once! — and at last o'er-ran

My shadow! — Yes! — and so, abruptly paused,
Torn with tremendous laughter and wild tears,
Feeling truth's silent and relentless scorn,
Flame-edged, of all I was and all my deeds;
And set upon by the derisive shout
And fear and anger of the world, I broke
The circus walls, and hastily passed on,
And found the Darkness everywhere, and saw,
Thereafter, certain stars! . . . And now, at least,
I go no more the dull, determined rounds,
Like a tame squirrel whirling in its cage!
I'm a Noctambulist: and in the Night
The star-traced, trackless ways return no more. . . .
Thus have I learned that only in the dark
The freedom and the kingdom of the spirit
Are ours to seek; and I have felt the one
Utterly loosed and loving woman's heart,
There where the twilights failed and night came on,
Thrill to life's inmost secret on my breast . . .
And I have known the whole of life and been
The whole of man! The Night is best! — for here,
Here where the world throngs and the day-light falls,
Here show the Marches and no Stars are seen! . . ."
He rose, and we, who watched his face, discerned
The passion! . . . Swiftly he resumed his cloak —
And he was gone! . . . and thro' the open door
Bellowed the tempest, and the star-less dark
Over our one, quenched candle reigned supreme! . . .

II

We heard his footfall on the vacant stair
The whole night long. We lay awake in bed
And heard him climb; — but those who slept instead
Smiled and assured us that he was not there.
We had our own important things to care
About — place, profit and the daily bread;
And then the street so thundered in one's head . . .
And often life 's a commonplace affair!
Yet then we heard him! — we not they were right:
We heard him — Yes! tho' now we sleep by night
Almost as soundly as we sleep by day,
We waked, we heard him, heard — and nothing more. . . .
For we, inert as they who heard not, lay
Damned and dishonoured as he passed our door!

III

Recreants un-armoured for a hopeless war,
We made with life the needful compromise:
Yet, tho' we were not great or good or wise,
We knew that he was not as all men are! . . .
The meaning of the things he said was far
To us, and in the darkness of his skies,
Save as the light was mirrored in his eyes,
I think we never saw a single star . . .
Yet, in the vexed and vital years of youth,
At night, alone, with all our bargains made,
We found his smile intolerable as truth;
For we, sered soul-deep by that scorn of his,
Felt in ourselves his ancient, undismayed,
Inexorable incredulities! . . .

IV

"Only the Dark! . . . Only the Mystery! . . ."
He said. "Only beyond, above, before! . . .
Only — O Captives of the wave-walled shore! —
Only the incommensurable sea! . . .
Only, for eyes that all too wisely see
The sun at midday, and are blind therefore,
Only the Dark — where, lambent to the core,
Gyre the great stars' deepening galaxy! . . .
Only of ignorance the ancient wrong;
Only of life the viewless counterpart;
Only of truth the secret undivined;
Only — new ranges for the feet of song,
New loves of the inextinguishable heart,
New powers of the imperishable mind! . . ."

FAITH

I

THERE's a star overseas like a dew-drop new-hung on
a bud that uncloses;
There's a fire in the turrets of heaven; there's a flush
on the breast of the sea;
And the gates of the sun-rise are filled with a flame as of
myriad roses,
That kindles ineffable vistas, a world re-created for
me.

There's a hill in its vestment of dew-fall that kneels like
a priest to the altar;
Low bird-cries resound in the silence, frail tendrils
reach forth to the light;
The fields flower-breasted are fragrant, and fresh the
faint breezes that falter: —
Life's faith in the future is perfect, life's dream of eter-
nity bright! . . .

If ours were the faith of the petals unfolding, the nest
and its treasure, —
The faith all revealed and illumined, the faith that
alone makes us free, —

What divine understanding were ours of the sun-light
that flows without measure,
Of the silver of moon-light that rings down the reso-
nant floor of the sea! . . .

What divine understanding for life; for the world how
majestic a meaning;
What truths by the way-side; in martyrdom, poverty,
pain, what delight;
What poems in the midnight; what visions revealed
that the darkness was screening,
As like fire-tinged incense the dawn-mists flush deep
round the knees of the night! . . .

O, beware! for the safety we cherish is false: — we are
blind! we are soothless! —
Have we learned how the fields are made fruitful? Are
we aimed to life's ultimate goal? —
O for faith to accept for our lives not an ecstasy less, not
a truth less,
Than the world and the senses afford us, than are
sphered in the scope of the soul! . . .

II

To-day the Lord sleeps in the House of Life . . .
Round him the dark is dumb, deserted, deep;
And all the haste we make, the feast we keep,
The law we serve with cross and cord and knife,
The Gods we supplicate, the tears we weep,
The crowns we win as victors in the strife,
The forms and fears with which our days are rife,
Like vague, fantastic dreams perturb his sleep . . .
He sleeps and dreams to-day and yesterday. —
When shall he wake, and in his eyes the breath
Of day-break burn with truth's eternal beams?
When shall he wake? . . . We ask in wild dismay! ——
Haste! lest he sleep, as now he sleeps and dreams,
Dreamless to-morrow in the House of Death! . . .

III

Yet, as the truth's new testament contrives,
  Daily within the meditative mind,
  Orbits of light where thought before was blind,
  And where was doubt supreme imperatives; —
So, in the high adventure of our lives,
  As we are real, receptive, unresigned,
  Seeking the Lord, we shall not fail to find:
  Till strength by strength his regency revives . . .
Then shall his will and work alone be done
  In all we do; his voice alone resound
  In all we say; and he alone confound —
Imperishable when all else perisheth! —
  With eyes of daring and dominion,
  The void, vast vision of the Sphinx of Death! . . .

IV

Hourly to find perfection in all things,
And in ourselves perfection; — day by day,
Greatly adventured on the endless way,
To realize truth's inspired imaginings; —
To beat up the wide skies of thought on wings
Radiant with sunrise; — to depart away
Into the future with the great grave gay
Passionate heart of life that loves and sings; —
This is the soul's desire! — the secret aim
Of life's dim aspiration, from the sod
Thro' countless forms, thro' beast and man and God! —
This is the mind's pure ecstasy; and this
Is love, which kindles to a single flame
Life's immemorial validities!

THE CITY

I

Wherever man has loved and lived,
Has starved his soul or slaked his lust,
Has trusted and betrayed his trust,
Has wept, rejoiced, blasphemed, believed;
Wherever in the senseless dust
His wearied, hasty feet have trod;
Wherever he has dreamed of God
And dared believe that Time was just;
Wherever, heedless to discern
And careless of the soul's concern,
Man's avid heart has coveted
The little of his daily need, —
Thrones, powers, dominions, riches, bread; —
While, overgrown with tare and weed,
The fruit of Truth's eternal seed
Was left to rot unharvested;
Wherever man has heard, instead
Of thought's serene, grave, inward voice,
The world's persuasion, loud and sweet,
And made with all the world his choice
To traffic in the common street,
To live as all men must who live
For what reward the world can give,

To wander aimless here and there
On life's familiar thoroughfare
Where the Innumerable pass,
Whose days are waste as withered grass,
In fear and hope, in storm and stress,
From nothingness to nothingness;
Wherever man has been steadfast
And, patient as the truth must be,
Fulfilled his human works and days,
Or, blind with secret ecstasy,
Has fled from death, and fled in vain,
By vagrant, dark, eccentric ways
Which led no-whither first and last;
Wherever man, diseased, insane,
Delirious, drunk in heart or brain,
Has ravened like a raging beast,
Has strayed or stayed, has been, has ceased,
Inglorious and irresolute;
Wherever man was mild and mute,
Was loud and fierce, was sane and strong;
Wherever man has blown life's lute
And phrased the harmony of things,
Or touched the harp of love to song
And learned to use the voice that sings;
Wherever, in whatever days,
Majestic, mighty, mad or mean,
Man's human being once has been
Or being once has ceased to be; —

There, interlocked inseparably,
Diverse yet single near and far,
There is the City! — where the ways
And byways of the City are.

II

There is the City! — vast, sublime,
Serene, discordant, sordid, small, —
Hither and hence in space and time
The self-same City, all in all,
Is here and there, is first and last!
There where the twilights fail and fall;
There in the wide and wasted Past
When Time was vacant, vague and vast;
There where the light of truth is least,
Where life, transcendent of the beast,
Was first in man's resemblance cast;
There where in jungle, waste and fen,
Coeval with the birth of man,
The byways and the ways began,
There is the City — there and then!
And there and thence the City is:
Where near and far the countless ways
Record in each evolving phase
Man's endless metamorphosis;
Thence from the sunless depths below,
Hither by ways we know not of
Of life necessity and love,

The long, hard, human high-ways come;
And whence they come and where they go, —
There at the dark circumference,
There is the City, there and thence; —
Here where we live and make our home,
Here is the City! — here and now:
Here where the dull and aimless plow
Of gross desire and bitter need
Furrows the barren fields where chance
Has sown the seed of circumstance
Whereof the fruit is Destiny;
Here where the thrifty soil that teems
With good grain waste and many a weed
Starves at its root the Sacred Tree
Of Knowledge; here where Love dies young,
Where Truth's stern secrets find no tongue,
Where the mind's weakness and the heart's despair
Brim the deep bowl of human ignorance
With the mandragora of dreams;
Here in the loud, long thoroughfare
Made straight and smooth by countless feet;
Here in the mean, familiar street
Where, in the Spirit's jeopardy,
Men wake and sleep and take no care
Of why or whither, whence or where: —
Here is the City! — here are we! . . .
Here is the City — Here! . . . But there,
There where the brave are gone before,

There where the lamps of Truth and Love
Shine steadfast at the Secret Door,
Is not the City! — there above,
And there beyond and forward there;
There where the high-ways hasten hence;
There, up the steep and star-lit stair,
Where they are gone, the Gods we did not know!
Have we not seen them, heard them go
In virtue and beneficence,
The Bearers of the Sacred Flame?
Who thro' the long, primeval twilights came,
And thro' these purlieus where we are,
Led by a faith, a song, a star,
Passed on to where the summits kindle, where
The living light grows large and lovelier,
And where the eye long used to vigil may
Discern, ineffable and far away,
Tranquil as Truth's transcendent love,
Spacious and excellently fair,
Rise, pure as diamond,
Poised in the sun-swept silence far beyond
And far above,
Where at its heart the City is,
The still, clear marbles of the calm Acropolis!

III

There is the City! — thither let us go!
We have too long lived out our times in vain!

Let us depart! What profit shall we gain
If, when the labour of all our days is done,
Ourselves are vanquished and the world is won?
Let us depart! for well we know
Life wills us forward to a better place
Than this cramped room of weakness and disgrace,
And forward all the song-voiced trumpets blow
Their challenge to the rising sun!
Forward the thoroughfares of thought go hence
From excellence to excellence,
And have we will to walk thereon,
Hence, as they lead us, we may go!
Hence as they lead us, They are gone,
Those hardy exiles who with eager feet
Fare forward up the shining street;
And as They neither rest nor sleep
But Truth's eternal vigil keep
In strength and silence — so must we!
For there, and always forward there,
There is the City, where the soul
Is free in Truth's divine control
And native to the lucent air!
Let us depart! — tho' there above
It well may be the ways are steep
The great lights far, the darkness deep,
The Soul has no concern thereof, —
Whose longing is all thither and all hence,
Whose will is unappeased to make its home

Not in these purlieus of the City where
The sunless hovels of man's indigence
Crowd meanly on the sordid thoroughfare,
But there where thought's immeasurable dome
Kindles and clears and is fulfilled with light!
For there by day the lordly sun
Of all the heart's surpassing love
Moves in his azure calm immensities;
For there by night
The stars of Truth are one by one,
Like silver syllables of song,
Uttered in thought's tense taciturnities,
And forward, all the large night long,
In stately constellations move;
For there the Parapets and Palaces,
Resplendent in their ordered distances, —
The lofty Towers, the shining Dome
Of the Spirit's Fatherhouse, of Home,
Rise radiant in the lucent, free,
Fabulous spaces of eternity;
And on the ramparts, all day long,
Clear-eyed and calm and vigilant,
The mind's supreme tranquillities
Brood on the soul's infinities
Till all we are and all that is
Is sacred and significant; —
And there and then at last we may stand up and sing,
Rise up with the rose-coloured dawn on either wing,

And with a voice exceeding sweet and strong
Phrase in the heart's antiphonies of song
The soul's clear chaunt of challenge and reprieve, —
And perfectly, at last, and wisely live!
For, builded solely from its base for this,
There, perfect at the core, man's City is!

LOWER NEW YORK

BEFORE DAWN

Time has no spectacle more stern and strange;
Life has no sleep so dense as that which lies
On walls and windows blank as sightless eyes,
On court and prison, warehouse and exchange.
Earth has no silence such as fills the range
Of streets left bare beneath the haughty skies: —
Of unremembered human miseries
Churned without purpose in the trough of change.
For here where day by day the tide-race rolls
Of sordid greed and passions mean and blind,
Here is a vast necropolis of souls!
And life that waits as with suspended breath,
Weary and still, here seems more dead than death,
Aimless and empty as an idiot's mind.

AT DAWN

Here is the dawn a hopeless thing to see:
Sordid and pale as is the face of one
Who sinks exhausted in oblivion
After a night of deep debauchery.
Here, as the light reveals relentlessly
All that the soul has lost and greed has won,

Scarce we believe that somewhere now the sun
Dawns overseas in stainless majesty.
Yet the day comes! — ghastly and harsh and thin
Down the cold street; and now, from far away,
We hear a vast and sullen rumour run,
As of the tides of ocean turning in. . . .
And know, for yet another human day,
The world's dull, dreadful labour is begun!

I

We have loathed him, we have loved him, we have lived for him and died for him;
We have agonized and wearied in the travail of his birth;
We have lured him and procured him, we have sinned for him and lied for him,
And known what he was worth to us — and known what he was worth!

We have never dared to trust him, never dared to tell the truth to him:
We have done the work and waited; we have borne the pain and smiled;
We have been despair and evil, virtue, aspiration, youth to him;
We have cheated him and charmed him, for we knew he was a child!

We were never what he thought us, never what he said we seemed to him;
And of course we never told him, and of course we never cared:
We have been the thing he loved, the strength he lacked, the dreams he dreamed to him,

And for what his love conceived us he has worked
and sung and dared.

And our hearts have bled and broken, and our flesh
— God knows! — has burned for him:
In despair and pain and passion we have loved him
— as we must!
For his children and his labour we have schemed for
him and yearned for him,
Believed his boast and soothed his tears, assuaged
and shared his lust.

We have loved him without reason, without stint,
without surcease of him;
We have feared his wrath and weakness, feared his
madness, feared his fears;
We have tamed him and caressed him, and our lives
have had no peace of him:
For his Gods and greeds and glories cost our blood
and sweat and tears! . . .

He has made us to his pleasure: we have had the sense-
less worst of him;
We have made him to our purpose, then and now
and still the same!
And as wife and slave and mistress, now adored and
now accursed of him,

We have bought, seduced, compelled him to our
sacred single aim.

Yes, we triumph! He is ours! — But ours, we know,
is not the whole of him!
Weak and stupid, vain or vicious, we possess, who
care and can;
But we learn, when he escapes in truth and spirit all
control of him,
That while we are always woman, he is less — and
more than man! . . .

SUN, MOON AND STARS

I

THE SUN

Source, strength and splendour of the dawn and day;
Lord of the noon and of the afternoon;
Soul of the sunset; master of the moon; —
We are thy creatures! . . . who shall pass away
From grief and joy, from labour and love and play, —
The will that strives, the hopes that weary and swoon: —
For these are life and life shall leave us soon —
Thy life incarnate in our mortal clay.
Yet is it conscious of some nobler end,
In us transfigured, than to live and die
Blind and enslaved: in ways unknown to thee,
In free communion with a lover or friend,
In thought's perfection, we exemplify
What more than life thy life has come to be!

II

THE MOON

Moon of our nights of youth, grave ardent gold
Majestic mistress of the yearning sea;
Moon of our young love's blinding ecstasy;
Moon of mused secrets that no tongue has told;—
Moon of our first fine midnights, pure and cold, . . .
When, with the stir of God's nativity
Within us, we discerned the Mystery
And guessed what death might give and life withhold!
Moon of impassioned vigil in the high
Spacious tranquillities of earth and sky,
As, then, we saw thy light in darkness move
Like guidance on the immeasurable seas,
So, now, we see the full-orbed moon of love
Move on the soul's more vast immensities! . . .

III

THE STARS

THEY saw the self-same stars we see to-night
At Ur, Nippur, Mosul and Ispahan,
And where the Tigris and Euphrates ran,
And where Bagdad displayed the Caliph's might.
The Jew, the swart Arabian robed in white,
The Kurd, the camel and the caravan
Passed on their way from Cairo to Sistan,
Led thro' the trackless deserts by their light.
They saw the self-same stars as we: — perchance
They felt as we the self-same rapt surmise
Of life and death! . . . until they saw as we, —
Thrilled with the soul's supreme significance, —
Strange constellations dawn within their eyes,
Wrought on the shadow of eternity! . . .

ILION

I

They turned into the day-break, and the light
Lay level in their eyes. They held the free
Fortunate wind across the blue bland sea:
Of all their lives the flame burned wild and bright.
Clear as the eyes of Helen shone by night
The lordly stars, which spelled their destiny;
The sun's perennial splendour seemed to be
Gold as the hair of Helen in their sight.
But Agamemnon, saviour of the fleet,
Only forever saw, with haunted eyes,
Iphigeneia bleeding at his feet;
And, in prophetic rapture, felt, too late,
Fierce as the eyes of Clytemnestra's hate,
Burst from his palsied tongue death's strangling
cries! . . .

II

Crying, she woke, with fate's relentless hand
Cold at her heart; and, breathless with despair,
She saw the great gaunt galleys, and the flare
Of camp-fires kindling on the Trojan strand.
And Menelaus! — she beheld him stand

With ravaged eyes that could not cease to
stare. . . .
She heard, borne up the windy Ilian air,
The lyric language of the Fatherland.
Then, with a roar as when the storm-wind blows,
The innumerable alien city rose,
And thronged the ramparts, — where, amid the
gloom,
The inviolate victim of God's thwarted lust,
Cassandra, robed in mourning, crowned with dust,
Wailed in deaf ears the inexorable doom!

III

He saw Scamander crawl in fire and blood,
Stagnant with slain, beneath the burning wall.
Seaward he drove! But still, tho' like a pall,
Darkly, where once the rumouring city stood,
He felt Death's immemorial silence brood;
Shrill in his blood-sick heart he heard, withal,
The shriek of Hecuba, the frenzied call
Of Hector's Bride, bereft of motherhood!
And still of Helen his only visions were!
Her eyes of wonder, and her endless hair,
Lightening like sunrise! . . . still he felt, for her
His wrath had branded with a harlot's shame,
Leap in his heart the blind consuming flame
Of love imperishable and love's despair!

HERAKLES

". . . AMPHITRYON, banished from Tiryns, established himself at Thebes. Herakles, brought up in that city and skilful in physical exercises, surpassed all other men in the strength of his body and the greatness of his soul. He was scarcely adolescent when he delivered Thebes [from the tyranny of Erginus and the Minyans], and thus paid his debt of gratitude to his country. . . . The fame of this exploit spread through the whole of Greece, and every one admired it as a prodigy. Creon, the King, himself impressed by the courage of the young man, gave him his daughter Megara in marriage; and, treating him like his own son, confided to him the government of his kingdom. But Eurystheus, King of Argos, jealous of the growth of the power of Herakles, summoned him to appear before him, and ordered him to perform his labours. At first Herakles refused, but Zeus commanded him to obey Eurystheus. Herakles went to Delphi, and, having consulted the oracle, he was told that the Gods ordered him to perform the twelve labours, and that, after their completion, he would receive immortality.

"On receiving this command, Herakles fell into great distress [of mind] . . . he was seized with a frenzy. . . . Madness took possession of his sick mind . . . in one of his ecstasies of fury, . . . Herakles pierced with arrows the children which he had had by Megara. . . .

Having recovered from his madness and become aware of his error, he was greatly afflicted by the excess of his misfortune . . . he remained quietly withdrawn in his house for a long time, avoiding all human society. Time having calmed his grief, Herakles went to Eurystheus, determined to affront every peril [and perform the labours]. . . .

"Zeus kept Prometheus chained for having given fire to mankind, and caused his heart to be devoured by an eagle. Herakles, seeing that Prometheus was punished only for having done good to men, . . . saved the common benefactor."

DIODORUS SICULUS, IV, 10–11, and 15.

CHARACTERS

HERAKLES
MEGARA, his wife
AMPHITRYON, his father
ALCMENA, his mother
IOLAUS, his nephew
THE THREE SONS OF HERAKLES (in infancy)
THE POET
THE WOMAN
CREON, King of Thebes, father of MEGARA
THE MESSENGER OF EURYSTHEUS
TEIRESIAS
THE PYTHIA, at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi
THE PROPHETES at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi
PROMETHEUS

also

MEN AND HARLOTS FROM THE TAVERN
THE CHORUS OF RESPONDENTS, in the Temple of Zeus at Thebes
THE CHORUS OF WORSHIPPERS, before the Temple of Apollo at Delphi
THE CHORUS OF OLD MEN, before the Temple of Hera at Thebes

also

Guests at the King's feast, Populace, Soldiers, Messengers, Slaves, etc.

FIRST SCENE

The Agora at Thebes. Sunset.

The Agora is empty except for the WOMAN, who is seated on a bench against the wall of a house, and the POET, who stands before her, facing the sunset.

HERAKLES

FIRST SCENE

The POET

The birds go home at sunset, and my heart
Goes home. The day closes its tired wings,
And in the violet evening there are stars
And silence.....And the best there was to do,
The best of us we left undone to-day,
Now like a warrior worn with doubtful wars,
Waits for the morrow, heart-sick yet resolved.
The sense of life is secret and serene
At twilight, and the flame of life —

The WOMAN

Is love!

The POET turns as tho' suddenly recalled to a sense of her presence, and looks at her for a moment in silence.

The POET

Of old your eyes persuade the heart like peril.....
You are the Siren of the seas of life.
What stately ships, full-sailed for Paradise,
Captained by young, superb adventurers,
Haughty in hope, impassioned in resolve,

Thrilled with a mystic wonder in the mind,
Drawn from their course, lie shipwrecked on your shores! —
What is your wish with me? I saw your eyes
Call to my heart across the crowded square.
Now in the sunset all the crowd is gone.
We are alone. Why did you summon me?

A moment's pause.

The WOMAN

You are but newly come into the city?

The POET

Since yesterday.

The WOMAN

What race and place are yours?

The POET

In Athens was I born, and there my youth
Was spent, and there, if home there be, is home.

The WOMAN

Why are you come to Thebes? What hope of good,
What fear of ill impels your feet so far?

The POET

My hope is nameless, and the ills I dread
Are housed within me! — but the restless mind

While there is life, affords us no reprieve;
The impatient heart, eagerly and beyond
The daybreak and the dark, drives us afar
Over strange oceans and unvisited lands.....

The WOMAN

The impatient heart! — O Heart of man that yearns
After the Stranger Woman of young dreams!.....

The POET

I know! I know! — young dreams!.....But mine are
old,
Tragic and old, divine and real as life,
And dwell within me like a visitation
Of Truth's unconquerable and mystic hope
Whereof no part is the flushed heart's desire.
What tho' — as inwardly my blood believes —
You were the Stranger Woman —

The WOMAN

I am She!
And anciently and now I am the one
Inveterate quest of life's dream-haunted days.
In myriad ways you seek me, and you find
Me! — tho' you think to find a lordlier thing.
Yet, tho' you find me, you shall know me not,
And I am strange to you forever!

The POET

To me
Nothing of you is strange — unless your name!
I have had many lives before, where you
Were something more to me than life itself;
And after all my youth's vexed years with you,
I know you and your secret — and the soul
Within you, dark and undivined, I know!
I am so long possessed of you I seem
To have you as I have the voice of song,
Clear in my heart and brain. There is no phrase
Of laughter or desire or lamentation
In all the tones and tremors of your voice,
Various as wind, no silver gayeties,
No cries, tense and tear-laden, strange to me.
There is no perfume, bounty, brilliancy
Or pleasure of your body, nor the least
Stir of your subtle silks I know not of.
I know the grave, smooth silence of your brows;
And when your lips are eloquent and flushed
With hunger and with thirst of love, I know you!
I know the swift, sweet motion of your hands
When they are fain of touch and tenderness.....
And I have long explored and learned to know
The deep, dark twilights of your eyes and hair,
The young, pale profile of your breasts — and how
You are all warm and lustrous and superb!
Neither within the house of ivory,

The house of rose and pearl, am I a stranger:
Your thought is in my brain, your mighty heart
Is in my heart, — your soul is in my soul!
I know the chaste reluctance and the wild
Appeal of the indomitable desire
When life is given entire as love will!.....
And I have seen and celebrate in you
The patient, tender truth and trust and care,
The soul's perfection breathing into life
Thro' love's obscure and elemental ways.....

The WOMAN

You love me! I am she! I am the quest,
I am the goal! — You love me!

The POET

I have learned
How, in the last fulfilment of the spirit,
There is a nobler end for life than love,
There is a nobler end for love than you!

The WOMAN

You have not well beheld me, who I am, —
The Stranger Woman, even the truth of dreams,
Splendid and strong and secret.....

The POET

Fairer still
Is the celestial bride, and statelier!.....
I have so greatly loved you that my love

Is grown out of its childhood, which you are,
To more than you can welcome — more than all
Your love and you can freely welcome home!
I am alone and silent after all;
For none receive me now, none love me now.....
Time was when you received me, when your heart
Was radiant and a refuge to me!—then
I uttered and was heard! — and I devised
To set the sunset-coloured gem of song
Upon your brows, to make your raiment of
The unquiet silver of calm, moonlit seas,
To give you sandals hued like flowers, and fill
Your eyes with daybreak, and transfuse your hair
With forest-twilights when the leaves are young
And it is morning!.....Then I said the new,
The utmost things, and all things of you; kissed
The wine-cup and your lips — straitly to feel
The sacred frenzy shake this heart that bears
The sacred flame, until I sang to you
The wonder-song of the primeval earth —
How Eros was first-born of all the Gods,
And first made Chaos pregnant of the world.
O there was that to rouse me in a woman! —
The beauty that is wanton as life is;
The candour that is crystal-clear as stars;
The love that has no other end but life,
The life that has no other end but love;
And all she is not, and the secrecy

She is, — and life's lost wisdom, pure of thought,
Which rises in her from what sunless springs!..
But now the ecstasies of thought advance
The torch beyond the precincts of your love,
Beyond the human pale of your dominion.

The WOMAN

So does life weary when its youth is spent —
And you count weariness a kind of wisdom!
O you are wise — in words! You are a poet!
The cheat is not too plain. Yet one discerns
How you are chafed and sharpened with desire!
The thrill strikes thro' — and you make poems of it,
Since there's imagination left at least
To prove us how we are not respectable
And give to lust a lyric rapture: — Yes!
Tamed tho' he be, the animal will sing!

The POET

The animal will sing and drink and lust
And lie with you and love you — as a beast
Can love!.....for these and all hilarities
Of the hot blood are still and anciently
The same — they share their excellence with you!
It is alone the spirit which is chaste;
Which is austere and high; which is not eased
By all old pious and pleasurable things;
Which is athirst for news! — and in the search

Is ventured out of your horizons, far
Gone past you and beyond you, to return
No more..... whether the quest prove real or vain!
I guess myself is more than you suppose,
And excellent even beyond my dreams! —
Who shall instruct me further what I am
And shame my aspiration by their own?
Not you, indeed! I know your message to me.
You tell me nothing: for it is not I,
The lyric voice, the florid animal,
The lover, who is yours — as he must be
Who asks neither advancement nor the news!

The WOMAN

What are you more than sense and sentiment,
Like other men? I have known men enough! —
And many men your betters, and some men
Strained to a singular high attitude
Like yours, — and I have found where lust was laired
In all of them! You leave me undeceived:
The brute nurses his passions at your breast,
And at the heart of your humanity
There is the weak, wild longing of all men
Merely for love and life's companioned joys
And the mild fruit of happiness.

The POET

Not I
Am minded any more for facile things.

For the indwelling God stirs in his sleep
Within me, seeing in dreams the early light
Of dawn blur the blind casement of his room.....

The WOMAN

Poor windy man, so grandly, with God's name,
Mystic and eloquent! O you are desolate
As a dead mind! I may not well believe
Laughter stirs nowhere in you — as in me
It leaps to shatter down your dreams.....

The POET

Of all
Sad things I least can laugh with you. Despise,
Pity me as you will, yet so it is:
I have not any sense of humour in me!
I was not once so naked to the truth,
So daring and defenceless; I was keen-
Sighted to see the humour of the thing
And none outlaughed me! — but at last I felt
Something more terrible than ridicule
Strangely and stern as justice in myself!
Then your alert and cherished humour-sense
Sickened and all died out in me, died utterly
Away.....and left me with an abject smile,
Which, like a threadbare cloak, can scarce afford
Decent concealment to me from the world, —
And something that still serves for laughter when

The wine is in me!..... But my secret is
That I am serious! You will think me mad!
But there have lightened to my inward eye
Spacious and radiant serenities
Wherein there is a voice calling me on!.....
My heart is shaken with the power of it!
Before my citadel it sounds a challenge
To wake the audacious virtues of the soul,
Which are themselves their own sole arbiter! —
Therefore I can no longer laugh with you.
I am too tensely nerved with expectation
Still to discern and celebrate the joke,
And sort my mood with yours.

A moment's pause.

And so all's said,
And I will leave you with your life, your love,
Your laughter — which I neither serve nor share.

Night has fallen. The POET pauses a moment and then starts to go. The WOMAN rises suddenly and prepares to follow him.

The WOMAN

It shall not be — I will not leave you now.

A moment's silence while the POET looks at her intently.

The POET

Why do you follow me?

The WOMAN

I have no light.

The POET

And have I any you are witness of? —
You know not what I am nor where I go.

The WOMAN

I have discerned that you are something more
Than other men, to me. You give my life
Serious, at last, and strange significance.
And there is latent in your words to me
Expression of supreme and secret things,
Phrases of song that bring a high, swift sense
Of flight and of adventure to the soul!
And what I have received of other men
You give me not — the love, the lust, the gold,
Which are a woman's price to the whole world.
O, I am curious of the fellowship
Of one who will not love me lest he lose
The marriage-kiss of the celestial bride, —
Lest being my master he is not his own,
And gaining me he lose himself thereby.
Therefore I will not leave you — for a little.....
It may be I shall one day touch the term
And find the worth of words, as now I am
Not curious of love nor eager any more.
Then I shall leave you.....and go on with life,
Satiated anew and hungry as of old!

The POET

Hungry? — for news! for news!.....You know it too,
The hunger and the thirst that drive us on,
As once the gad-fly drove across the world
The paranymph of God, delirious Io?
You know the hunger? — then we'll go together,
Whither we cannot tell, nor to what end!

End of the First Scene.

SECOND SCENE

A later hour of the same night as in the first scene. A feast in the palace of CREON.

About the feast-table are CREON, HERAKLES, AMPHITRYON, ALCMENA, MEGARA, IOLAUS, and other men and women of noble Theban families. A HERALD stands behind the King's chair. The feast is served by slaves and the door guarded by soldiers.

SECOND SCENE

CREON

to the HERALD

The feast is ended. Call for silence!

The HERALD

Silence!

Silence! The King will speak!

There is silence. Then is heard a murmur as of a great throng outside the palace. A moment's pause.

CREON

Hearken!.....To-night
There is a rumour in my porticoes
Of multitudes. It is my people. I
Have called them, and this hour would straitly speak
With them and you. I have not lightly caused
Assemblage of yourselves and all the sons
Of Cadmus, for with news of great concern
To all my people am I charged to-night.

To the guards

Therefore set open wide the doors and bid

My Thebans enter! I have words to say
And deeds to do that must not longer wait.

The doors are thrown open and the people enter without confusion. Gradually the entire hall is completely filled. When they are all entered and silence is reëstablished,

CREON

without rising; in an even, clear, quiet voice

Children of Cadmus — Thebans — Citizens —
My people! — Hear me for your own concern!
And rest assured I treat to-night with you
No less a matter than the commonwealth.
Yet I beseech you to be patient with me
Also for some small business of my own —
Some phrases of a life's apology
That I've matured with life itself for you,
And now at last have ordered and prepared —
Briefly, at least, and cheerfully! — to suit
Your understanding — and my own as well!

A moment's pause.

I am your King; and I am old — and wise!
For wisdom — when the latter end of life
Becomes indeed a luminous and large
Tranquillity, as of some afternoon
Of Autumn and calm weather by the sea —
Inures at last — after so many years! .....
At least there is a fine unfettered sense
Of liberality which leads me on

To say that I am wise — and you will judge
And disapprove me if you must! You may
Believe me that I know what must be done
While there is hope and Fortune's face is toward;—
And I can now afford your censure! Yes,
I can afford at last expensive things
Which cost a man the kingdoms of the world
And all their glory! I have lived my life;
And there is nothing now can make it worth
My while to shirk by any cant or creed,
Enthusiasm or expectancy,
Silence or sentiment, the free, extreme
Analysis, the unrelenting, clear,
Calm vision of a disenchanted mind.
You cannot bribe me now by any threat
Of ruin to my life's high edifice,
Or any dazzled prospect of ambition —
Hope or desire that it may one day grow
Statelier and all my dreams come true of it!—
To keep the old, pathetic, pitiable
Conspiracy of silence and pretence
That barely saves the faith on which you build!
I know that you must build while there is hope
Of profit, while the Bride is beautiful,
While Fortune's prize, in whatsoever coin
The world receives, inflames you to the task;
And while you build you cannot help but say
Your architecture is the noblest art —

The only art that life can labour at!
You see the torch of life held high and bright
Over my disillusion, and your hearts
Are sad for me — but I rejoice with you!
For I have built — and care not very much
What happens! I am patient of all fools
Who leave the why unasked; and I am mild
With knaves, who teach the bawdy, blatant beast
Pious and pleasant ways, — for I am old
And unimpassioned and contemplative.
I think, despite these sceptical strange words,
You will respect me, — for I am your King,
And I have proved myself among you all
An architect. Therefore you will not say,
"This is the voice of failure!" — yet I know
That you will find some other things to say
Not half so true! For when a man is old,
He knows, at least, how utterly himself
Has failed! But say what things of me you will —
And be assured I sympathize! Indeed,
A voice like mine is no-wise terrible,
As might be the tremendous voice of truth,
Should it find speech that you could understand!
Yet it may vex and dreadfully distress
Reflective men — if such indeed there be
Among you all — and therefore be assured
I sympathize!

A moment's pause.

And so I give you thanks.....
And take my leave. I think you almost guess
The public business which is your concern—
And mine, since I concern the state and you.
Briefly 't is mete that I advise you of it:
I am your King—and will be so no more!
Take leave of me, my people! for at last
I have divined a man more apt than I
To wage your wars and guide your policies.—

A moment's pause. The King rises. All those seated at table follow his example.

To him, Children of Cadmus, O my people,
I yield your government, as I bequeath,
When I am dead, my crown and realm to him!
His praise is in your hearts; and by my will,
And with your leave and loving welcome, he
Shall be your Lord and govern in my place,
Who slew Erginus and delivered Thebes—
My grandsons' father and in love my son—
Herakles!

The HERALD

Hail! All hail to Herakles!

A storm of enthusiasm breaks out among the people. When it has subsided and quiet is restored, all eyes turn to HERAKLES. A moment of silence. Then he begins to speak, finding his words with excitement and difficulty.

HERAKLES

Children of Cadmus! — You have heard the King —
You know his will — but mine you shall not know
Till all is known and there is Justice in me!.....
Justice — and Truth!..... Nothing is yet resolved —
Nothing!..... And who can tell what Truth shall be?
The adventurer departs; the tidal drift
Clutches his keel; his eyes are dazed and dark;
Strange are his dreams; — and the discovery
Is far!..... But should I find myself, be sure
That I will be a guide unto you all!.....

A moment's pause.

I'll say no more! — Nothing is yet resolved.....

A moment of silence. At last the people applaud. Then, at a sign from the King, the doors are again thrown open and the citizens pass out. The King remains standing after they are gone. MEGARA, ALCMENA, AMPHITRYON, IOLAUS and the other guests at the feast surround HERAKLES, pouring forth congratulations and applause. HERAKLES, deeply moved, withdraws violently from the embraces of his family and the acclamations of his friends and, turning toward the King, breaks silence with profound passion.

HERAKLES

Is this your wisdom, Sire? and is it wise,
Lightly, and thus with calm complacency,

Now to believe that I, that Herakles
Should hold himself so cheaply as your price?
How have you come to think me, whom you love
And praise, so vain a thing and spiritless,
That I, like any rash, rapacious man,
Should seize this brief preferment and renown
And block with brilliant insufficiencies
The fair-way of ambition? — By the Gods,
How pitiable a thing is man's regard!
Since you, who count yourself matured in truth,
Can guess no nobler destiny for man
Than all his life to be as you have been,
Public and proud, constrained and crafty-wise,
As fortune served and chance was bountiful:—
Himself, the while, illiberal and unknown,
Captive and undelivered and deceived!

Turning to the others

And you! I marvel who it is you name,
With tears and praise and passion, Herakles!
By God! What gives you leave to think of me
So meanly, and rejoice to see me sold
Like any common man for a small thing?
Have I not loved you all, incessantly
Loved you and lived with you?—yet in despite
Of all love's witness and the test of time
You dare to hold me in so little honour
That you have thought me apt to be content

In these safe human mediocrities—
That you have deemed my hope so temperate,
For what I am, as fortune and renown
Or all the world's casual supremacies!
For my whole life long, with my whole heart's love,
I have been with you—and you have not known me!

ALCMENA

What ails you, child?.....My child! I love you, know
you—
You are my son!

HERAKLES

My self is yet unborn,
Which was not when your womb conceived and bore!

AMPHITRYON

What rage is this? Implore the King's forgiveness!
Pray to the Gods who have shown favour to you!

HERAKLES

turning to the King

Sire, I will not serve the Gods or you!
Sire, I will not rule by grace of God
Or by your grace! I will be Lord of none,
And thus unto myself be Lord and Law!—

No longer speaking directly to the King

You think to bribe and browbeat Herakles,

Force his desire and cheat his hope: — at last
Learn from my lips that I will not be less
In hope or longing than a man must be!
I, with the soul's immortal thirst to slake,
How shall I down into the shallow stream
Where beasts and many men have drunk together
And left foul waters strangled in their course?
Nay, by this cup I am not comforted,
I am not stayed! — Rather, I swear to you
Thirst shall consume me unappeased until
I fill my pitcher at the living source,
The secret, spiritual springs that rise,
Radiant and crystalline in the deep light,
Far on the utmost heights unvisited!
You know me not — and scarce have I begun
To know myself! Yet this at least I know:
The life-lust and the florid animal
Which laughs and longs, is pleasured and distressed —
The heart that feels and feigns, that faints and dreams,
That sorrows and is glad — the facile brain
That schemes and lies and is alert to seize
Success and is ambitious of no more
Than serviceable ingenuity
Can aptly compass — that supremely serves
To methodize the waste of the world's work
To profitable order and endow
Life's labour with a seeming worth and end —
These are not I!

CREON

Your pardon! — and be sure
I have no angered heart nor outraged pride
To vex you with! — I pray you answer me
One idle question: — after all, what else
Is there of you save life and heart and brain?
You are what feels and thinks and is. What else
Is Herakles? — are you?

HERAKLES

I am what knows!
I am myself, that knows — and shall be known!.....

End of the Second Scene.

THIRD SCENE

Later of the same night as in the first two scenes. It is a clear, calm night of moon and stars. A public street near the city wall. At regular intervals the wall is rendered accessible by flights of narrow stone steps. The inner face of the wall is in a deep shadow which stretches out almost to the street.

HERAKLES appears, emerging from the shadow, as he climbs the nearest flight of steps. He reaches the top of the wall and pauses a moment in silence.

THIRD SCENE

HERAKLES

I know them now.....but me they shall not know,
Even at last! My youth was spent with them;
They were my most familiar and my friends —
My lovers and the lights of welcome to me.....
Yet they discerned me not, they knew not me!.....
And never shall they know what I become!
Death is between us now: my youth is dead,
And I am dying!.....and I shall be reborn
Beyond their understanding and their love.....
Even now I was a very stranger to them!
How shall it be when all myself has been
Is passed away and I am born again?.....
I dare not yet believe how utterly
I shall be loveless then — even when love is
A better thing to give, and, to receive,
A more exalted thing!.....Then I shall know,
And be unknown; I shall be friendless then
However I am heart-sick and alone! —
O tender twilights of the days gone by,
Peopled with those we loved and leave behind! —
O secret, great departures, shared by none,
Cheered by no friendly voices from the shore,
No lamps set seaward for the ship's return! —

O irremediable solitude
Of him who sails, adrift and harbourless,
Far out into the distance and the dawn! —
Speak to my heart — when shall my lover come?
Where is my friend? and how shall I be known?
And who shall know me?.....When the Child is born,
The desolate immortal Child, I know
That in the night of his tremendous birth,
And in the dreadful solitude, he wails
And wonders and is no-wise comforted!
Shall none receive the Child? Am I at once
The knower and the known? Is there no light
From soul to soul, no love from heart to heart
Can span the abyss and flame across the cold,
Dark, dreadful spaces of my isolation?.....
I need assurance, now since love has failed
So far, and life has so far failed to prove
Myself or make me manifest to men.
Who shall assure me and bear witness to me?
Whence shall the signal — as from star to star
Rings the clear cry of the celestial choir —
Sound thro' the tragic taciturnities
Of solitude, to me?.....to me at last! —
Love to the Lover, welcome to the Friend,
Raptures of recognition to the Lord!.....

HERAKLES pauses a moment; then turns and slowly goes back down the steps by which he ascended. As he descends he becomes gradually engulfed in the

deep shadow. Before he reaches the ground, the POET and the WOMAN appear ascending to the wall by another flight of steps, some distance away. They reach the top and pause a moment gazing over the landscape. When at last they begin to speak, the sound of their voices causes HERAKLES to stop; and he continues to stand attentive and stirless in the shadow of the wall.

The POET

.....Where is Endymion? The moon replies,
Hence is my lover!.....and the heart cries, Hence!.....
And hence the soul discerns the perfect friend!.....
They lure us hence, the patient hills and fields;
The streams persuade us hence — hence to the sea,
Where as of old the mythos of the life
Of man enacts its endless destiny,
And vast horizons indicate the soul!.....
Hence is the furtherance of hope —

The WOMAN

The song
You lately sang cries to the spirit, Hence!
Sing me the song again, for I would learn
The words and have it in my heart alway.

The POET

I made it on a day of happiness,
And I am glad to-night — of life, and you.

He sings.

He is on the road before us, who is Lord and Life and Lover,
He is forward in the fair-way, he is secret, swift and far;
And our eyes shall wake to find him and our hungry hearts discover,
As he leads us, where we follow; as he loves us, what we are!

Where the winds are shouting seaward, where the sea is streaming onward,
Where the Voice calls down to find us, fearless on the starlit way,
We who watch shall make the land-fall as the ship drives shoreward, sunward,
Where the mountains rise resplendent, rose-wreathed in the dawn of day!

There his heart shall be our father-house, his arms receive and hold us; —
As he knows us we are equal; as he trusts us we are free!
We shall learn surpassing secrets that no lips but his have told us,
We shall find in his embrace ourselves transformed to more than we!

And thereafter in his house shall he alone be Lord and Master;
Life shall yield to his dominion; they shall serve who once were proud;
We shall go with him together up the pathway fast and faster;
We shall see the stars surround us as his eyes dissolve the cloud!

We shall see the skies stand open; we shall hear the stars in chorus;
From the shining peaks of thought his voice shall answer, pure and high;
And the spacious gates of light shall stand asunder full before us;
And, as all alone we enter, we shall know the Lord is I!

The WOMAN

How mystic, mad and possible it seems,
How like a clearance of life's tangled skein,
To dream, to say, to sing, "I am the Lord!"
Poet! you know me better than myself.....

The POET

My poems are made of more than all I know.....

A moment of silence.

The WOMAN

Shall we go farther on? — no matter where,
So we go on.....

The POET

How the heart melts with song!.....
How the brain reels in the storm-wind of thought!.....
Come, let us go! The light is there.....

The POET and the WOMAN turn and go down the wall, away from the spot where HERAKLES is standing. The two figures seem to disappear in the distance.

HERAKLES

emerging from the shadow into the moonlit street

The light! —
There where my dreams discern an excellence
Unrealized, which I am — whither I go!.....
I have but matched the beast with other beasts,
The man with other men; and when my strength,
Impatient and unused, challenged me on,
I have but guessed that haply, with the Gods
At strife, God was within me, to defy
Their curse and prove their equal and prevail!
Now let me learn to say, I am the Lord!
Since in the forward vistas of my hope,
There is the Lord, the Saviour — there am I!
For thus I am assured my end is not
Where the world ends and humble hopes go home;
Where men are crowned and beasts are satiated! —

Too well I know that I contain them all —
The serpent, wolf and jackal, ape and cur,
Lion and hog: — of old the beasts are laired
In life's primeval wilderness, the dark,
Trackless and devil-haunted waste within me!.....
Yet, in the mind's rapt outlook, I discern
That in the jungle is the Householder,
Whose patient labour has made room and home
And let the light into his dwelling-place!
Now, while he sleeps, it may be, in his stead
Garrulous ghosts and fauns infest the gloom
And in his name accomplish shameful deeds,
Shallow and eloquent sincerities,
Profession of all faiths that falsify,
And threadbare fashions of a masquerade —
While from the teeming dark they snarl and whine,
Chatter and roar and laugh, gibber and grin
With greedy eyes and fangs — the beasts, the beasts
Who harbour where his realm is unreclaimed!.....
Yet I believe he shall not sleep alway!
Nay, he shall wake and witness — and suspect
Himself is otherwise than all of these!.....
O he shall stake his life upon that vision!
And he shall wonderfully at last contrive
To bring the outlawed beasts into dominion
And hold them captive — having levelled down
The dark recesses where they crouched untamed!
He shall dispel the spectres, and return

The jungle to a fruitful harvest-field! —
And then — O then, after the victory,
He shall go forth in power and look abroad
Over the spacious acres of the soul,
All drowned in azure and tranquillity,
Where, all bearing his harness and subdued,
The mighty beasts labour and drive afar
The ploughshare of his will, and spread the seed,
And reap the harvest — and proclaim the Lord
In word and deed, and celebrate the Lord!.....
Then shall he know the Lord is I! and feel
That ecstasy of knowledge which is truth,
Which is religion, which is self and soul!.....

The voice of IOLAUS
calling in the near distance

Answer me, Lord!..... Where art thou?..... Speak to me!.....

IOLAUS appears.

Lord, is it thou?.....

HERAKLES

He said — the Lord is I!

End of the Third Scene.

FOURTH SCENE

Toward midnight of the same night as in the first three scenes.
Street before the house of HERAKLES.
MEGARA and the THREE SONS OF HERAKLES *are in the house.*

FOURTH SCENE

The voice of MEGARA
low and sweet from within the house

The rose-wreathed lattice opens wide,
Beyond, the night is calm and deep; —
My little doves lie fast asleep
Like lilies fallen side by side.

They laid them down at evening;
Their eyes were clear as moonlit dew;
Across their brows the sunset threw
The golden shadow of its wing.

HERAKLES and IOLAUS enter slowly. They pause and listen.

They kissed my face, with tender words;
Their eyelids closed as flowers close;
In dreamless, motionless repose
They fell asleep like tired birds.

HERAKLES

Iolaus.....

IOLAUS

Lord?

HERAKLES

So Pyrrha in the dark
Sang to the children of Deukalion.....
So long as there is life it shall not cease,
It shall not change, this tender lullaby,
This ancient minstrelsy of motherhood.
Wherever there is human happiness
Or human grief or life's immortal will,
The inviolate serenities of night
Shall hear the woman singing to her sons,
Her little doves — my children, Iolaus!
Who shall be men, as they shall wake from sleep,
Radiant in the morning, and the might
Of manhood!.....

The voice of MEGARA
as before

My children sleep, whose lives fulfil
The soul's tranquillity and trust;
While clothed in life's immortal dust
The patient earth lies dark and still.

No rumour rises from the street;
The stars in silence dawn and die;
The moon goes up the violet sky
And treads the sea with silver feet;

And calm as inward joy, and deep,
Moonlight and starlight flood the room

Where close beside me in the gloom
Softly my little children sleep.

All night they lie against my breast
And sleep, whose dream of life begins:
Before the time of strife and sins,
Of tears and truth, they take their rest.

HERAKLES

.....They take their rest!.....Iolaus! Iolaus!
What of the soul? Can you not feel — as I
To-night bore witness to you all — that we,
Who seem to wake in the large light of life
So sensibly, in pure reality
Lie in the shadow of sleep, lie prone and still
On the parental breast of life like children,
And take our rest?.....

IOLAUS

Yet we have witness, Lord,
Who have so wrought in the substantial world, —
Yet we have witness that we wake indeed:
Is not Erginus slain, Orchomenos
Razed and enslaved, and Herakles —

HERAKLES

Enough! —
Not by the world's coarse manifest I am!
To me no voice but mine can testify:

The violence and the glare of deeds and things
Report me in no wise: — myself alone
Proves and reveals myself: no other sign
Is there at all of me save only I!
Have I not ceaselessly been here and there,
Come hither and gone hence, ambitiously
And humanly lived out my works and days?
Have I not gone abroad seeking the soul
In vast and various venture, and returned
Weary and without wisdom after all?
When have I known myself, who know the world?
When have I felt, in trial or victory,
The choir, the torch, the festival of truth
Gladden the soul's inviolate dwelling-place?.....
Now am I no more eager of many things;
Neither am I much curious of proof,
Save as some still conviction, secretly
Wakes in the inmost mind and justifies
New lights, new values, new coherencies,
New strengths and virtues up the endless scale.
For well I know how anciently and long
The massive Sphinx has stood as now it stands,
A veiled, portentous shape of shadow and silence,
Against the nightfall in the mind's dark highway;
And well I know that, anciently as now,
To the inscrutable mystery of being
There is no voice shall answer save the clear
Silences singing in the awakened soul!.....

FOURTH SCENE

IOLAUS

There is no voice shall answer!.....Is there more
Of man's inheritance than all we know?
Are we not merely men who labour and live
In the plain light, in the gross world; who rest
By night; who fall asleep at last in death;
Who feel, invincibly, darkly over us,
The harsh dominion of the inconstant Gods?

HERAKLES

Nay! We are adepts of a mystery!.....
The secret is at hand — how shall we sleep?
We are as men in awful expectation
Before the threshold of a sanctuary,—
Whose eyes grow sometimes clear in the long vigil,
Whose hearts grow sometimes mild, till they discern
The glamour of a glory on the veil,
The murmur of a music thro' the portal —
The secret, incommunicable signs
Of the God's radiant presence in his house!

The voice of MEGARA
as before

My little doves, the nest is warm —
Lie close! the dawn shall come too soon.
Sleep, in the quiet of the moon!
Sleep, in the hollow of my arm!

For yesterday is all we are,
To-morrow all we yet shall be;
The end is where no eye can see.....
We only know the way is far!

We only know men grow and grieve
And die.....And death is strange and sore!
O sleep, my darlings, sleep!—before
The time returns to wake — to live!

A moment of silence.

HERAKLES

The ancient, patient, perfect love of women!.....
The service and the sacrifice of life
To life!.....But to what end of life?.....Her voice
Is clear and quiet as moonlit well-water
In a vessel of shining silver.....This is home!

A moment of silence.

IOLAUS

Let us enter, Lord.

HERAKLES

I shall not sleep to-night.
I know not how it is, there is within me
To-night a stern, unquiet intensity,
The strangeness of a secret unrevealed —
Almost, it seems, a fear of what I am!.....
I am as some itinerant by night,

Ignorant of his purpose and his path,
Curious of both, vigilant, fearful, fain,
Sleepless and sightless till the dawn is there!.....
I shall not stay or sleep. No more to me
The rash and resolute activities
Of manhood sound to-night their martial challenge
Into the bright arena of the world.
I am this hour inviolably alone,
And like a stranger in my solitude.....
A glitter of far lights is in my brain,
And in my heart something that is not hope,
And in my life a hushed suspense.....To-night,
Beyond the threshold and the fire-light,
Beyond the brief, familiar place of being,
Held by the narrow candle-flame of life
Against the invasive, dark, immense unknown,
I am abroad!.....The heart's unrest is nameless
And absolute the mind's uncertainties!
Ask me not whither, where or why I go:
The spacious night surrounds me, and my spirit
Ranges magnificently unappeased!.....

IOLAUS

Why must you go abroad seeking a dream
When here at home all is so bountiful?
Here the King's daughter croons your sons asleep;
Here Creon has given over to your hands
His kingship by your mighty hands secured;

Here in all Greece your name is glorious,
Your deeds extolled, your worth proclaimed in praise;—
Here your estate is grown so high and splendid
That hardly can the range of man's ambition
Compass a nobler destiny than yours!

HERAKLES

So is the range of man's ambition brief
And scanted of his true divinity!

IOLAUS

Why is your speech so strange to-night?

HERAKLES

'T is I
Am strange!.....And now I think my heart would break
To hear her sing again, to feel once more
The tenderness and the tranquillity
And sweetness of her love, — the delicate
Freshness of life's warm wonder in my house.
Come, let us go! — I shall not rest to-night.

IOLAUS

Where shall I follow, since you will not sleep?

HERAKLES

Let us go down into the human city,
Iolaus, where men and women with their sins

FOURTH SCENE

Stray in the festive street; where harp-players
And harlots and young men sit in the taverns,
And feel, all night until the daybreak stands
Pale and relentless in the waking world,
Life's wanton weed grow rankly in their souls!
Let us go down into the human city
And see how men and women love and live,
Whose feet go forward to the sepulchre,
Whose hearts are sick with tender syllables
Unspoken, and desires unsatisfied,
And liberalities no heart receives.....
Let us go down! — perchance they wait us there,
The meaning and the sign! — let us go down!

End of the Fourth Scene.

FIFTH SCENE

Before dawn of the next day. A street before a tavern. At intervals is heard the sound of music and voices and occasional bursts of laughter from within.

HERAKLES and IOLAUS enter.

FIFTH SCENE

IOLAUS

Now nothing more is left to seek or see.
Let us return. We have been long abroad;
We have been up and down the sleepless city
And far afield from where is happiness.....
Let us return.

HERAKLES

Here's still a last, least place
Where laughter is, where there is light and wine
And song.....

IOLAUS

And this is last, of all: beyond,
The lampless thoroughfare goes far away
Into the darkness, past the city wall.
Here we are come to the road's end. The earth
Lies out beyond, spacious and tranquil, where
The moonlight, like the nimbus that surrounds
A sage in meditation, quietly
And vastly and serenely luminous,
Lies, pale as dreams are pale, over the world!.....

Laughter is heard within the tavern. Then there is a moment of silence.

HERAKLES

Hark!.....How serene is silence!.....How austere!.....
How spacious!.....And how small and sad a thing
Is laughter — and how sometimes terrible!.....
There is no rumour save the sound of mirth
When souls are lost!.....I know not how it seems
To you, but I believe the Minotaur
Kept out of sight and sound like a good fellow,
And there was laughter in the labyrinth,
And it was pleasant for them who were lost —
Lost without hope, nor any vision of hope,
Nor any faith to vex them with ambition!
Hark!.....How they laugh and sing and take no heed,
The boys, the panders, and the singing-women,
The harlot and her ruffian! — And ourselves,
Iolaus, ourselves, who keep so delicate,
Who live so chaste and private — who are we,
Who fill with rumour as of a festival
The public precincts of the House of Life? —
Who vex the soul with gilt caparisons
And go in power and pride and policy,
Panders to profit and the world's applause,
About the brilliant business of the world?
Are we not of this ribald company,
These toilers for the selfsame prize as we,
Only of less profession and renown —
These merrymakers in the labyrinth,

Who singing sit beside the sallow tapers,
Derelict, dispossessed, delinquent, — dead?
Why so we are, by God! — king, soldier, priest,
Cut-purse and prostitute — in fact the same
Poor men and women, all of us — so kin,
So far adrift, so dark, so solitary!.....
Then let 's within and claim our fellowship!
They are of us — and they shall not be denied!

IOLAUS

Nay, we have seen to-night too much of this.
Let us return! The street and the night end.
Let us return — my heart is sick for home!.....

HERAKLES

O we are very far from where is home
To that within us which is comfortless —
The heart that is not patient of our thrift;
The soul that is not pleasured as we are
In safe, substantial mediocrity!
To-night, in street and tavern, anxiously,
Like children fatherless and dispossessed,
We were come out to seek our heritage;
We were come out to seek for more than all
Our lives have variously informed us of,
And more than all we know! — What rest is there,
Or where shall we go home, who have not found
Ourselves or what is ours? Whither away

And in what casement stands the lamp for us
Who drift as might a helmless derelict,
Errant with wind and tide over dark seas?
This shall we hardly learn at last to know;
And hardly shall our hearts receive the sign,
Our eyes find fire along the forward way,
Till that reprieve of freedom, peace and power
When we have saved the grain and strawed the chaff
With a most jealous fan throughout the ripe
Acreage of the spirit's harvest-field!.....
Truly I am not now as once I was,
Replete, exultant, proved, resistless, proud,
When all the Sons of Cadmus hailed me victor!
Rather my joy is quelled of all my deeds;
For worth is of myself, and I have none.....
Yet do they rate me by no means, whose choice
And crown proclaim me Lord! It well may be
You doubt me. True, I know not what it means—
And all is doubt!.....Yet there is born within me
To-night a sense of outcast solitude,
The darkness of a flame-rent thunder-cloud,
And peril and devastation in my brain, —
While in my heart, like devious, distant fire,
The thread of hope leads thro' the labyrinth!.....
What is the whole of life—when dreams come true;
When faith is realized; when the mind unlocks
The treasure-house of truth; when, loosed and winged,
Ambition ceases of itself to be

So gross, so measured, so commensurate
With possible and perishable things?.....

The voice of the WOMAN
singing in the tavern

I know not why we drink and feast
Unless it be to make us laugh,
Who waste the grain and store the chaff,
Who starve the God and glut the beast!

Yet know I not how wine can make,
Of all sad things, a woman smile;
For what is wine to so beguile
The heart that bleeds and will not break?

I know but this — we cannot bear
The truth that laughter hides so well!.....
And all the damned dead souls in Hell
Scream with eternal laughter there!

A rumour of voices in the tavern.

IOLAUS

Poor wanton wretch! — God pity her!

HERAKLES

Not so!
Bravely she sings her heart out, and in tune,
And strictly to the measure of its truth.

She knows the cost of some things — and their worth!
And briefly she has made a song of how
Her life is bankrupt for some scraps of tinsel.
No God is wise enough to pity her,
Nor sad enough! Her tragedy is yours
And mine; — O verily this alone is all
Life's tragedy, that in the strict account
Of truth we find — whose lives were cheaply sold
At the world's price in chaplet, coin or crown —
Such meagre profit, such tremendous loss!
And be assured it is not pitiable
To sing one's heart out, as she sings, of it:
Bravely, and not too sadly — and in tune!

The rumour of voices is renewed in the tavern. Then silence. A pause.

The voice of the POET
singing in the tavern

I know not what it is appears
To us so worth the tragic task: —
I know beneath his ribald masque
Man's sightless face is grey with tears!

I know not why it is we dread
To lie in death's embrace, alone: —
I know that he receives a stone
Who asks with all his love for bread!

I know not how, I know not why
We save the hope that naught fulfils: —
I know that life constrains and kills
The dying soul that will not die!.....

The rumour of voices breaks out in the tavern, louder than before.

HERAKLES

Hearken!.....and hear the voice of human woe,
Crying aloud and crude and comfortless!
Hark, from the cheated and distempered mind,
This harsh and ancient outburst of despair
Proclaim we are all perdurable men
And perjured souls and hearts that still conserve
A pitiable efficiency of pain!
Then question of yourself, and you shall find
His voice is mine and yours — if we could sing!
In each of us the serpent of despair
Sleeps — or is roused and strikes his poisoned fangs
Deep in the heart and brain, till one must die,
The serpent or the soul, — unless we charm
Serpent and soul with song! For song alone
Makes tolerable to us the acrid lees,
When time and truth have trod life's wine-press out,
Which, undiluted, in thought's crystal cup,
Are of too cogent anguish to the soul.

He charms who is not strong enough to slay!
He sings who is not brave enough to know,
And in himself feel truth exemplified!
Thus, I believe, the tragic poet sings
Because he fails to do a better thing:
Up from the ruins of his failure starts
The phœnix-bird of song: — he knows the while
How far aloft God's eagle eyes the sun!.....
Had we the will, the strength, the hardihood
To let the light inform us utterly,
And so transfuse and interchange with all
Gross elements that we were born again,
Perfect and true; — had we the stern resolve
And power and passion of our sacred cause
To bear the pangs of childbirth to the end,
And die to live; — in such comparison
What were a life's magnificence of song?.....
God is within the soul — and who has been
A little toward Him, sings! There is no more
To do for one who leaves the best undone.....
The poet wakes, indeed, — but merely sings!
Yet therefore is he more than other men;
For they come hardly into wakefulness,
And briefly, and in terror and great pain,
Soon to relapse, latent and lost in sleep.....
Are we not all, in silence and alone,
Sepulchred living under dreams and dust?.....
And if at last we dreadfully revive,

Straitened and gagged in death's caparisons,
Within the unspeakable solitude and dense
Silence and brutal blackness of the grave,
'T is but to glimpse the shining star of hope
With false persuasion of transcendent joy —
And then, as faith's uplifted face dislimns,
To die immobile in the narrow night,
Our hearts constricted with a frenzied fear
Of death's deceit, — with life's supreme appeal!
The poet sings — and lives! And I believe,
Should one audacious rebel — even the soul's
Champion — who was not eased with poems, essay
His strength against the terror and the tomb,
It might be they should wonderfully yield!
Yea! till he went his way from us, — perchance
To prove the Saviour of us, on his way!

A rumour of voices; then loud applause in the tavern.

A chorus of MEN and WOMEN
singing in the tavern

Dionysos!
God begot thee, woman bore thee,
Dionysos! Now before thee
Dance the Mænads who adore thee,
Who are of thy fellowship!
Every heart is frenzied for thee,
Dionysos! every lip
Glisters with the wine we pour thee,

Crimson as the sacred stain
When the sacrifice is slain —
Dionysos!

Wild laughter and applause within the tavern.

IOLAUS

Let us go hence, go hence! Behold, the night
Grows pale and passive as a sick man's face
At daybreak as he lies asleep. It dawns.
The livid light comes down the dreadful street
Timidly as a tired vagrant child,
And stands between us here before the tavern,
Naked and shivering in its threadbare dress.

HERAKLES

When shall it be that somewhere in the soul,
Beyond our life's horizons, dark with dreams,
The Child of Light shall rise from sleep and stand
Radiantly in the silent place of peace?.....
When shall it be that he shall venture down
The strange, remote, dark thoroughfares of thought,
And stand with shining feet before the tavern,
Where all night long his servants brawl and feast,
In pale and passionless severity?.....
When shall it be his presence shall eclipse
The flickering, brief, clandestine candle-light
That lust has kindled in the House of Life?.....
When shall he enter by the dolorous door

Of love and faith, where death at last comes in,
And bind the slaves by his resistless will,
Who made his house a place of harlotry
And lies and lamentations and vain deeds
And vice and violence and vociferation?.....
When shall he rise from sleep and go abroad?.....
We know not when — yet surely they shall know
Who keep his vigil! And, within that hour,
At last the slaves' ignoble revelry,
Their spectral humours and hilarities
Shall shudder and be still! — and they shall learn
How little is the Lord indeed from home!
And men shall witness and the Gods shall know
That he is risen — the grave and gracious Lord
Is risen, and on his way! And they shall see
His light go forward, and about his feet
The flowers of spiritual trust and truth
Wake in the silent meadows deep in dusk
Beside the stream-course of the spirit's life!
And they shall hear his voice, serene as stars,
Strengthen to song, like scattered birds who wake
Crying in wet tree-twilights, as with hands
Lustrous and loving he dilates the gloom
With muffled splendour; while, superbly winged,
The deep-eyed virtues of the soul's perfection
Rise like essential perfumes, sweet and strong!.....

The voice of the POET
singing in the tavern

Her eyes were dark as violet;
Her face was white as sunburnt sand.....
Because we could not understand,
Love turned and left us, hand in hand —
Her lips surrendered, red and wet!
I saw in the dishevelled dress
Only her pale, abandoned loveliness!

The voice of the WOMAN
singing in the tavern

He laid his brows against my breast;
He kissed my breast with lips of flame;
His voice made music of my name;
And in the sunless house of shame
Between his arms he held me pressed! —
He knew not what it was to me,
Or what to him, thereafter, love might be!

The voice of the POET
as before

I felt her heart beat hard and high;
I saw her eyes grow blurred and blind; —
There came a mist across my mind.....
Her hair fell round me soft as wind
And lustrous as a moonlit sky.....
For pleasure of her was my breath
Broken, as one who labours near to death!.....

The voice of the WOMAN
as before

The desolation; the despair;
The hope; the love; the will to be
Spendthrift of the heart's treasury;
The soul's inviolate chastity
Were all of me he could not share!
He asked no more of love than this;
He gave no better than a harlot's kiss!

The voice of the POET
as before

I held her all the dumb night long,
And still at daybreak she was there,
When, groping thro' the dark, dense air,
The dawn's chill fingers touched her bare
Pale body, clear and smooth as song!.....
The stealthy light fell, grey as dust,
Silently in the sordid place of lust!

The voice of the WOMAN
as before

Love cannot enter by the door
Where lust comes fierce and florid in!
They play no game that love can win,
Who stake the outlawed coins of sin, —
Yet love can lose one heart the more!
For truth lies deep beneath the lie;
And Death has digged no grave where souls can die!

The voice of the POET
as before

And silently I went my way;
The heart within me wailed and wept!.....
I would have kissed her as she slept —
And dared not! Like a thief I crept
Scared and alone into the day.....
And Love walked on with bleeding feet,
Heart-sick beside me in the dreadful street!

The voice of the WOMAN
as before

Quenched is the flame in us whereof
Love's sacred lamp is lit; and we
Are captives as damned souls must be;
And hence from Hell shall none go free
Whose lives have lost the key of love! —
Who neither asked nor sought nor knocked,
To them alone Truth's treasure-house is locked!

A confused tumult of voices in the tavern, which gradually subsides until at last there is silence.

IOLAUS

.....On broken heartstrings is their music made.
To hear them laugh and sing I half believe,
As you declare, that laughter broke their hearts.....
And they have fashioned of all shattered things
The phrase of an incomparable grief,

And called it song — which is indeed a cry
Something more strangely sad than any tears.
O come with me to the still house of joy! —
There is a sorrow in the vacant street,
And even the light is like a lamentation.....

He pauses. HERAKLES neither speaks nor stirs.

My heart is sad and strange — let us return!
There is a kind of judgment in the light —
Something austere and chaste and pitiless,
Dealing impartial justice to us all.....
Let us return — for God's sake let us go!
I can no longer bear to hear them sing!

HERAKLES

Hark — there is silence! Hark — and you shall hear,
Vast and inviolate, while they seem to sing,
The inveterate silence of the sepulchre —
Where he is lying inert as dead men lie,
Who is the deathless holy spirit of man —
Massively overwhelm their melody!
There is a sound, a semblance as of song,
A quiver of rhythmic motion in the air.....
But then and still thereafter there is silence,
Strictly distinguished to the inward ear.
Hark — and your soul shall hear it as I do!
They sing not — neither can they sing at all,
Who are as we in bondage to this world!

Their music is a shallow counterfeit,
The unsubstantial echo of a voice;—
Not the phrased splendour of essential song
Rumoured along the surface of the soul's
Deep seas of elemental harmony!.....
Hearken within yourself! Hearken within,
And hear how still, how gaunt and dumb it is!.....
O there is silence, silence in us all!
We are some handfuls of gross clay assembled,
Wherein there is a tremor and a tone,
A pitiable vibration which is song
As men rate song in their discordant lives.....
And far within is silence! — Otherwise,
Otherwise is the full free voice of man,
The one true voice, our own voice! — when there is
No silence by the altar any more;
When there, in strength and in tranquillity,
The hieratic, consecrated soul
Intones its canticle of self-reprieve,
And all its powers and liberties proclaim
The chaunt of the divine awakening!.....

The tavern door opens. A little crowd of men and women stumble noisily into the street. Among them are the POET and the WOMAN. They all pause uncertainly, staring vaguely about them.

A MAN

Here's the damned daylight back again.....

FIFTH SCENE

A HARLOT

God's name,
How cold it is!

The POET

As chill and chaste as death!

A MAN

Let's go back! There's no hospitality
And nothing comfortable in all this world
Save, there within, the wine and candle-light.

The POET

Save drunkenness and dark! — Is there not death?
Poor ghost! Poor tomb-dweller! — Is there not death?

A MAN

I would to God there were death — for all poets!
And silence for all singers, save of some
Small mirthful songs of bawdry and pleasant things.....

A HARLOT

Truth is, Stranger, your songs are keen as pain.

A MAN

His songs are serious — and most damnable!
Wine brings susceptibility — and dawn's
A desperate hour, when a mere song's grief
May tragically rouse the heart to tears
And vain misgivings.....

A HARLOT

As for me, I love
To weep when there is music. Give me songs
Of noble sentiment. Tears ease the heart —

A MAN

No tearful wench for me, nor tearful song!
Poets and whining women — damn such fools!
Gay hearts, gay women, gay good-fellowship,
Wine and gay music — so a man is pleased!

The POET

Eyes of the deathless Gods, look down, look down!
Behold this tragic masque of marionettes!.....
And laugh because we weep, and laugh the more
Because we laugh — and lie, and dare not live
In the confession of reality!

A MAN

Damn you, be silent! and deliver us
Of all your tedious solemnities!
Already you have robbed the night of mirth,
And now, despite the wine, nothing is left
But daylight and despondency.....

The WOMAN

In truth
I'll not believe a poet could so far
Vex and subdue your wanton hearts with words.

Are you not men of business and affairs,
Hard men of worldly practice and the world?
And he's — merely a voice! and such a voice
As you shall hardly hear or understand!
Nay, lads, I'll not believe you're out of tune
With laughter for a song's worth of strange words!
Even a poor wench can laugh! — The end of mirth
Comes only when the cheerless heart is cracked
And the frail spark of life flutters and fails!.....

The POET

.....Comes only when we learn there is more hope
Than life can give; more truth than words can say!

A HARLOT

Enough! It's bitter cold here in the dawn,
And I'll no longer wait and freeze and tire
To hear you snarl and curse at one another! —
Let's all to bed!

A MAN

The wench is right — let's go!

They all start off and move, in a straggling group, toward HERAKLES and IOLAUS, whose forms are hardly distinguishable in the grey twilight. Suddenly one of the women halts.

A HARLOT

There are strangers here — yonder!

A MAN

Two men.....

Calling

Who's there?

HERAKLES takes a step forward. A moment of silence.

A MAN

Your pardon!.....If a man may question you,
My Lord, and since we chance to meet — who are you?

A moment of silence. HERAKLES scans the faces before him almost anxiously.

HERAKLES

I am a man who seeks — and has not found;
Who asks — and is not answered; who has knocked —
Yet none has opened to him the secret door.
Do you bring news — and welcome — and the alms?

The WOMAN separates herself from the group and draws nearer to HERAKLES.

A HARLOT

What says he?

A MAN

I can hardly tell.....

A MAN

He seems
In some delusion —

The POET

Then perhaps he's drunk! —
Are we not all at dawn a little drunk?

The WOMAN

Be still!.....

The POET

What now? Why do you stare and stare?.....
I say his wine has been to many a man
Persuasion of delirious things and words,
And specious dreams of what It's all about.....

The WOMAN

Be still! Look in his eyes!.....

The POET
to HERAKLES

Your pardon, Sir!
The wench has drunk her share —

He turns to the WOMAN. The sight of her thrills and startles him. His whole mood and manner change. He draws close to her and speaks to her alone.

Tell me the news:
Is it the Secret? — Speak!

The WOMAN
speaking as tho' entranced

.....There is within

His eyes a candid infancy of light—
A birth of splendour — and a mystery!
A vigil — and a voice! — the light that leads,
Convinces and absolves — like sunlight! Far,
Far in his eyes it dawns!.....I seem to see
So far within — so far! His eyes are like
Some sudden window, opening in the night.....
Thence may the soul stare skyward — to the stars!
Look in his eyes, if you have will to see!
All other eyes of men are closed and dark.
Look in his eyes!—O, God's within, I know!
There, in the utmost distance, there is God!.....
There is the light of God, splendid and strange!.....

HERAKLES
with passion

Are you the herald and the messenger?

The POET

Herald of hope and messenger of news!.....

HERAKLES
heedless of all save the WOMAN

Is there indeed light in the window — light
To prove the Lord is in his house and wakes,
Who has slept overlong? You say the light
Is lit, the sign is there to show he wakes
At last — and feels across his solemn brows

The rose-winged wind of venture and vast skies,
And in the chamber where he darkly slept,
Gradual and pale, the calm, sane light of dawn?.....

The WOMAN

Yours is the sign! You are the light!

HERAKLES

At last!.....
How I have sought you! O is it you indeed?
And do you bring me news at last and welcome—
News of myself and welcome to the Lord?
O can I rest assured that even now
The Lord wakes in his chamber silently,
And like a stranger and athirst for love,
And all aflame to know and to be known?.....
Know you indeed the Lord? and is he there,
The one true perfect friend, who is most friendless;—
The matchless lover, whose love none receives,
And who is loved of none? Look in my eyes!
Tell me the light is there — that I am He!.....

The WOMAN

... .You are the strength, the light, the life, — the Lord!
What shall I do that I may love you?

The POET

Speak!
Have you the strength? Have you the light — the life?

HERAKLES

speaking to the WOMAN alone

Only believe and all shall yet be well!
Love and believe! I have no more than faith
To guide me, and no more to comfort me
Than love, — and mine is still the greater need!
Mine is the greater need, for mine, at last,
Mine is the greater strength! The strength is there —
The secret strength I almost fear to feel!
Measureless is the strength and merciless —
And like a child whose eyes are vague with sleep,
Haunted with dreams and dazed with real light; —
Whose mind, with dark pre-natal memories,
Is still perplexed, and hardly yet evolved
From ancient error and the brutal grasp
Of fear, force, falsehood, destiny, and death; —
Who is not yet self-realized, self-assured,
Conscious and calm in thought, in aim, in will.
Yet, as I must believe, do you believe,
And all shall come to pass, and all be well!.....

The WOMAN

I love and I believe! I see the light;
I feel the strength that will not stay or spare;
I know the Lord; I know that he shall come
To bring me the good news!

HERAKLES

O be assured

Of victory! I love you! I shall come
Again to you.....Be faithful till I come!

A MAN

What do they say?

A HARLOT

He bids her "Be thou faithful
Until I come!"

All laugh except HERAKLES, the WOMAN, and the POET, who remain thrilled, startled, and absorbed.

The POET

I scarce believe—and yet
He spoke as one having authority,
Having the truth's commandment clear as light
And blind as light and undissuadable;—
Being in strength creative as a God!
How shall I know?.....

The WOMAN
conscious only of HERAKLES

You will not leave me—now?

HERAKLES

I leave with you one who is more than I—
Even the soul—even the Spirit of Truth!.....
He shall be with you always to the end,
Who is the guide, the way, the comforter!

I may not rest: I love you and must go.
He shall bear witness in my stead. At last
I shall return:—and let there be a light,
His light undimmed to guide me to his house!
Be faithful—lest he fall again on sleep!

The WOMAN

I cannot leave you! Lord, I will not stay
Where you are not!—You are the way, the life;
You are the truth!

HERAKLES

I shall perchance be true
At last and perfect!.....Now, there is within me
Labour and violence, ruin and redemption.
My soul is an invaded citadel,
A precinct where contending armies wait,
Fierce and resolved,—the death-grip is still toward!.....
And if I win at all it shall be hard!
This very hour all is in jeopardy:—
The dark whirls in my vision even now;
And like the rumour of resurgent tides
I hear the ancient curse of error cry
Up well-worn estuaries of the shaken mind!.....

Suddenly voices are heard crying in the distance, and a confused rumour as of some great commotion in the city.

FIFTH SCENE

IOLAUS

Lord!— do you hear? Some mischief is afoot!
The city cries as with a single voice!—
What can it be? Some great event has chanced.....
I'll find the cause of this and come again.

IOLAUS hastens away.

HERAKLES

.....What great event concerns me save the soul?
And none cry in the Agora because
The soul of man at last comes to its own!

Again from the city rises a vast rumour of voices.

Hark!.....In my heart I hear their cries resound!
They are my soldiers and my people! Hark!.....
There in this hour my plumed battalions wait
Their leader, and my citizens their King.
They know not and they will not understand
Whither away I am gone on so far
Without them,—I, who shall not now return!.....
The die is cast, and, come what may, I take
The bounty of ambitious destinies
To be my birthright, nor shall Gods or men
Force and delude me from my utmost goal!

Again is heard the voice of a distant multitude.

The POET

How they cry out upon us, — all the world!

HERAKLES

.....Crying in vain! — O let me stay no more!
For still my heart, to hear the voice of the world —
My world of youth and conquest and renown —
Crying upon me, suffers and is not strong,
As the great heart of perfect love must be!
O, lest the good great moment, lest the vision,
Lest the redemption, now at last begun,
Suffer some wrong by reason of the heart's
Weakness and all my life's remembered joys,
Let me go forth away from them, away
From all that was and is, to what shall be —
Which, in this primal morning of the soul,
Thro' widening gateways of deliverance,
With endless promise cheers the forward way!.....

The WOMAN

Suffer me, and constrain me not to be
Without you! There is place for me to follow
Where you may go.....

HERAKLES

There are no followers
Nor captains on the soul's eternal quest!

The POET

Yet, if the torch go forward in your hand,
Shall not its splendour serve to guide us on?

Well may we question, who have sought so long,
Where you will go and whither is the way.

HERAKLES

Mine is my way and yours must be your own.
Ask me no more, nor wonder if my words
Are strict and stern —

The POET

I know the truth is hard,
Neither compassionate of any grief
Or hope or weakness or imperfect joys.
But to that soul which bears the truth, in chief,
Truth is relentless! And I say to you
That if you have not now already paid
Abundantly the incalculable cost,
Then you shall pay even to the uttermost!

HERAKLES

What is the price of truth?

The POET

What is the truth? —
There is the question!

HERAKLES

He shall answer it,
And only he who earns the right to say,

"I am the Truth!" — for he alone is true.
I stand in the beginning, and the way
Is hardly to be seen before my feet,
Which they must tread wherever it may go!.....
Ask me no questions, therefore, of the end.

The WOMAN

I am not curious, and I have no thought
Of mercy, and I have no other way
Than your way, Lord!.....

HERAKLES

O sacred human heart!
Come with me if you will, as best you may.
You are my witness how the sepulchre
Was rent and in his shroud the Sleeper stirred;
And how the prison door stood wide ajar
While momently, at least, lay out in light
The prospect of the soul's prosperities! —
You are my witness, and my heart wills well
That you, O Heart of faith! should share with me
Truth's gospel and the soul's new testament; —
Till, at the last, the Sleeper's dreams are done,
And he is waked and risen and on his way!.....

IOLAUS appears, coming in great haste.

IOLAUS

Lord! Lord!.....I bring you news —

FIFTH SCENE

HERAKLES

Who brings me news
Is welcome, if his news be news indeed!—
You all who have been with me in this hour,
You know how rashly I am hazarded,
As yet with no least knowledge of the way,
Into the free, far spaces of the soul!
I go because the wind is in my sails—
But chartless, helmless, on a shadowed sea;—
And haply I shall find the fabulous
Fair Paradise of truth, and hand in hand
With the grave Gods walk perfectly at last!.....
And haply I may shipwreck on the shores
Of circumstance and dark necessities!.....
Only the strength within me is assured,—
The strength of Herakles! All else is doubt.....
And O my spirit is fain of news!

IOLAUS

The King
Demands your presence in the Agora.

A MAN
to his companions

The King?.....He said the King!

A HARLOT
in an awed voice

What man is this?

HERAKLES

The King? — No public cares concern me now.
What will the King with me?

IOLAUS

I know but this:
An embassy comes hither from Eurystheus,
Sovereign of Argos. Heedless of the King,
They will not speak at his command; instead
They say their message is alone for you.

HERAKLES

Go on before me, I will shortly come;
Leave me, for I have need to be alone.

The WOMAN

Lord.....

HERAKLES

For a little, leave me. I will come.
This much is certain, that I will be free!
And therefore I will come to bid farewell
To rank and power and every servitude.
I will not heed the cost of what may bring
Deliverance. Leave me! I will shortly come —
And find you there where the world waits for me!.....

After a moment of hesitation they all depart: the POET first, then the WOMAN and IOLAUS; lastly the little crowd from the tavern. As these last are leaving they pause a moment to look at HERAKLES.

FIFTH SCENE

A MAN

My Lord, forgive me if I question you —
What is your name?

HERAKLES

Men call me Herakles.

The men and women depart, leaving HERAKLES alone.

End of the Fifth Scene.

SIXTH SCENE

This scene immediately follows the preceding in time. The sun is only just risen.

Thebes. Before the house of HERAKLES.

MEGARA stands upon the threshold of the open door.

SIXTH SCENE

MEGARA

The golden wings of light beat up the sky;
The stars are set; the dew-fall and the dawn
Are everywhere, quiet as benediction;
The earth's fresh perfumes, like an incense, rise
Into the windless, universal air;
And even the old, blank city ways are still
And flushed like pathways in love's paradise.....
It is morning! — and my lover is not come!

A pause. MEGARA sings.

She waited in the bride-chamber;
Her face was young and clear as light;
Her lips were sensuous and bright; —
The Bridegroom came not unto her.

She kept fresh flowers in the room;
Her eyes were spacious as the sea;
And thro' the open casement she
Kept vigil till her Lord should come.

She saw the stars go up the sky;
The sunlight and the moonlight were

Like crowns and chaplets in her hair;—
She would not break her faith to die.

She set a signal in the day;
She set a beacon in the night;
The guarded flame of love burned white
And single in her heart alway.

She waited in the bride-chamber:
Her hair was soft as sleep; her breast
Was tranquil, like a place of rest.....
The Bridegroom came not unto her.

"His heart," she said, "is here at home;
His love, I know, abides with me;
And he would choose his bride to be
Prepared and perfect should he come."

She waited in the lonely years;
The bride-chamber was all her room;
She dreamed not of another doom;
She had no thought or time for tears.

And when the Bridegroom came at last
And found his Bride serene and strong,
He said, "Beloved, I tarried long,
But now despair and doubt are passed."

She said, "I know not what you mean;
I have no part with suffering
Or grief or fear; a better thing
Life cannot be than mine has been!

For I have lived with Truth and Love,
And all my life was beautiful
And strong and fortunate and full
And great and good and glad thereof!"

A pause.

Friendless he seemed — inimical and strange
And splendid, when his angered strength cast down
The diadem and scorned the pride of kings!
Yet wherefore were his rapture and his rage?
Why was he so tremendous and estranged
And resolute last night against us all?
Where is he now — and when shall he return.....
My heart is like a place of desolation,
And like a lost child in a woful place;
The jealous depths of love are calm no more,
After last night, but shaken and dismayed.....
I would to God he were come home to me!

She pauses to gaze about her and then returns slowly into the house. A moment after, HERAKLES appears.

HERAKLES

O bland and tranquil human habitation,

Fortunate house of happiness and love,
Where love is life and life is love, where truth
Is very tender and exquisite as song,
And where the meaning of the Mystery
Is simply and ineffably revealed!—
O treasure-house of kind and serious joys,
Hushed, holy house of peace, my house, my home!—
I know not in my heart what nameless fear
Afflicts me as mine eyes behold you now!
Is it perhaps the dread that hence from you
Lies the new promise of the forward way,
And hence the issue, and the sunrise hence?
Yet, in the clear accounting of all things,
I have no guess what voyage of the soul
Could take me hence from you, O tranquil house!—
O mother of my children, O my sons,—
My little sons, so fair and young,—from you!
Is not the best of being here at home?—
The candour and the loveliness of life;
Beauty and innocence of days; and all
The wise, warm, ancient virtues of the heart,
And all the peace of the prodigious soul?.....
O Well-beloved, the whole heart's yield of flowers
Perfumes the quiet chambers where you sleep!.....
My love is with you, and my dearest thought
Is of you, and where you are there am I
In spirit and in love!.....I will not fear!
This is the loveliest and most bountiful

Of all good fortune of man's mortal life:
Surely it shall not for the truth's sake pass
Out of the sum of real prosperities!
Rather my loved ones and my love shall share,
Always with me and to whatever end,
The days and ways of the enfranchised soul!

A moment's pause. Then he calls:

Megara!

MEGARA appears in the doorway.

MEGARA

Herakles!—at last! at last!

She runs forward to greet him.

My love — my dear, dear love — at last come home!

HERAKLES

Is not my whole heart always here at home?

MEGARA

O welcome, welcome!— As it was with me
When I first loved you, so it is to-day!
You come to me as after many days,
After long, anxious, heart-sick days of doubt.....
My heart was like a house of mourning: now
There is rejoicing and the sound of song,
The light of festival!— The Well-beloved
Returns at last, the Bridegroom is at hand!

HERAKLES

O come into my arms! I seem to feel
Beat in your breast the strong and simple heart,
The faithful and inveterate heart of life,
Which animates with the bright blood of being
The diverse fruit of earth's vast pregnancies!.....

They embrace. A slight pause.

Where are my sons?

MEGARA

They hardly wake from sleep.
One called you in the night, speaking your name.

HERAKLES

My children!.....And my Love! O Megara,
Say that you love me always to the end!

MEGARA

I love you to whatever end may come,
Ever and always and without reprieve!

HERAKLES

Then, and in silence, hear me to the last.
I know how little truth is speakable;
And I shall hardly find, for all my pains,
Language sufficient to express the soul;—
Yet it may be your love shall understand!—
Last night you saw me and you heard me speak.

SIXTH SCENE

Wonder no more because I cast away
The crown! — for even last night I was assured
That in the compass of the soul's ambition,
In the resources of man's utmost strength,
In the dim, secret treasure-house of thought,
There were perfections more supreme, desires
More absolute, achievements more divine,
Than any that the world is witness of!.....
Then did I blindly wreak my inmost will,
And had no understanding of my deeds.
But in the dawn, — O, in the morning, — then
I found the very truth, as in a vision! —
The light! — and I was plainly justified,
And perfectly; for this is truth's first lesson,
And easiest, and least of price, — that all
Business and pleasure and preferment, fame
And government and grandeurs of this world
Are but the toys with which the mind of man
Beguiles the leisures of its infancy.
Who knows the mind's austere maturities,
The heart's full-grown intensities; — who sees
The treasures of the Spirit, fabulous
Beyond imagination; — I believe
Naught else, to him, is profitable at all —
No triumphs, glories, kingdoms, amplitudes
Of fortune, pleasures, majesties, dominions!
I am but newly waked into the light;
My way begins, — my way, my hope, my hazard.

For truly I have found myself at last,
And in myself a promise more supreme
And an inheritance more bountiful
Than thought can understand or faith believe!.....
Self-mastered to some purpose more than mine,
In the first morning, with the soul's first-fruits
I come to you!—O brave wise heart of love,
Surely you shall not fear to share with me
The best, hereafter, and the best alone:
Love, labour, and the fierce incertitudes!.....

MEGARA

Hardly I guess the meaning of your words.
And well it may be that in spite of all
I shall not understand even at last.....
Yet take me — keep me — lead me to your light!
My sons and you and I, — we are one life,
One love, one being, — naught shall make us twain!

HERAKLES

I also know not what my words may mean.....
I know not what the price of truth may be,
Or what the cost of man's perfection is
To man, or how the soul is satisfied.
I know but this: that ever and evermore
I shall not rest!.....O it may come to pass
That if you love me you shall die of it —
As who shall not before the Journey's end?

For thus we die to live perpetually!.....
And even it well may be, for all I know,
That only in exceeding bitter sorrow
Are we so slain and sacrificed and saved! —
That all with heavy labour and cruel cost
The soul must reap in life's neglected fields
The living bread, and in untended vineyards
Press from ripe fruit the consecrated wine,
Which are its livelihood. Who knows how hard
The truth's divine imperatives shall prove?
Courage, strong heart! Be sure there is no more
That must be done than man at best can do!
And if you find yourself, as well you may,
Best in the strong sublimity of love, —
O then come with me to the perfect end!.....

MEGARA

What have I else in all my life to do? —
Your spirit is my strength, your heart my refuge!

HERAKLES

Megara!.....O it may be we shall win,
And come into the heritage! At least
We shall go on in the fair-way till death,
Serious and stedfast and supremely one!

The SONS OF HERAKLES appear in the doorway of the house.

MEGARA

.....In the fair-way till death!

HERAKLES

My Love!

He perceives his children, who issue from the doorway.

My sons!

HERAKLES tenderly embraces the children.

A MESSENGER appears.

The MESSENGER

Herakles! — Lord! — The envoys of Eurystheus,
Sovereign of Argos, stand before the King —

HERAKLES

Why are you come to me?

The MESSENGER

They will not speak
Their master's message save alone to you.
Therefore the summons of the King is sent
To bid you straightway to the Agora.

HERAKLES

The Agora!.....Liberty is beyond!.....
Thro' and beyond my path of freedom leads.

SIXTH SCENE

He turns to MEGARA and the children.

Come, Well-beloved — let us go down together.
For they must take farewell of the rank world
Who walk their own ways into Paradise!.....

End of the Sixth Scene.

SEVENTH SCENE

Early morning. The beginning of this scene and the preceding scene are contemporaneous.

Thebes. The Agora.

In the Agora are CREON and ALCMENA, seated and surrounded by a body of soldiers. Immediately before the King stands AMPHITRYON; at some distance beyond stand the MESSENGERS OF EURYSTHEUS, three in number. The rest of the Agora is filled by a vast concourse of people.

SEVENTH SCENE

AMPHITRYON

They come safe-guarded as Ambassadors,
As envoys of Eurystheus — to my son.

ALCMENA

To Herakles.....

AMPHITRYON

With insolence and pride
They dare recall our kinship and proclaim
Herakles subject of the Argive King;
Yet sworn to silence save to him they seek,
By no persuasions will their lips disclose
The serious purpose of their embassage.

AMPHITRYON seats himself beside the King.

CREON

These are strange tidings; and the veil that masques
The face of destiny seems dark indeed.....

AMPHITRYON

I fear their silence and their proud reserve.
What can their message be to Herakles?

CREON

What to their message shall your son reply?
Not in the vulgar press of circumstance
Is fate concealed, but in the soul of man!
And we have seen, last night, into the soul
Of Herakles enough, at least, to make
The question poignant and the doubt supreme!

ALCMENA

Last night!.....I thought a stranger stood before me
Clothed in the likeness of my son.....To-day
I dare not guess what dark catastrophe
The Gods prepare to try his secret strength,
To thwart his undivined, misguided will!

CREON

I fear no secret message, nor the stroke
Of adverse fortune, nor the coward heart
Or evil purpose of Eurystheus' hate,
Nor dark catastrophe;—I fear the man
Who struck the crown of kingship from his brows
And gave us earnest of the soul's ambition!
Man fashions fate after his own design;
And in his likeness, as a mirror is,
The face of life is featured and expressed;
And he deciphers on a vacant page
His sense, his story, his significance.
Who can predict what Herakles shall see

When he lays bare the future's shrouded face?
Who can foretell what sense his soul shall find,
What stately meaning, what majestic myth,
Inscribed on life's familiar palimpsest?

ALCMENA

He is beyond recognizance!..... My love's
Maternal arms feel vacant of my son!

CREON

.....I have played the game out to its mean mild end,
And won the world's prize, in a certain measure.
Now, being quit with fortune and grown old,
I am no longer partisan, — as needs
Man must be when his stake is in the game, —
But, disabused of life's persuasions, which
O'erbalance justice in its own defence,
I sit apart in the clear empty light
Of wisdom, as in some pale aftermath,
And grow, in justice and serenity,
Clearly and patiently contemplative.
Therefore I find for this emergency
Some thoughts which come not all inaptly in
To help our understanding of the man
Who yesternight was strange unto us all.
For I have lately, in the liberal years,
Foregone the lore of cheap philosophies
Which find an ultimate identity

In all the souls and destinies of men.
Crowds are but numbers; and at last I see
There are not merely players of the game;
There is not, high or low, only the one
Sensible and substantial prize to which
The fiat of the world gives currency, —
And which, in various ways, is always won!
There is besides the one, estranged, rare man,
Whose light of life is splendid in the soul,
Burns with a kind of glory in his strength,
And gives such special grandeur to ambition,
That he will make no terms with fortune, nor
Play for whatever prize the game affords.
He thinks to vanquish destiny, enforce
The Gods, and, by transcendent strength and toil,
Earn — what alone of all things must be earned —
The soul's prize — which is always just the soul! —
The soul, self-mastered, self-assured, self-known,
God-like! and with the deathless Gods co-heir
Of truth's ineffable eternities; —
The soul, despised, neglected and concealed, —
And yet, in truth, as in his raptured mind,
Perhaps the great prize — which is always lost!
And therefore, wisdom says, no prize at all!
But merely, for the common use of life,
A fatal lure, a frenzied hope, a dream
And madness of imaginative minds.....
So is the world's work justified! And last,

Now, when the game of life is played — and lost, —
Lost in the main, yet somehow hurried through
To the calm, threadbare, tolerable end, —
The humour of the thing comes quietly home,
As we discern how wise we were to take
The loss for granted — and enjoy the game!
We learn our weakness; learn to thank the Gods
That we were weak and had no prospect of
The prize, no lonely and supreme ambitions;
Learn, at the last, on what fantastic terms
Life is a conflict, since in fate's despite
All men may yet prove victor — save the strong!
The irony, to man's maturer mind,
Sorts with his ancient pleasant sense of things.
He marks the stress of gross necessities,
Immedicable and unalterable,
Which shape the trifling destinies of man;
He finds an average of circumstance,
Equal to all men in the true last test;
He learns how much, by temperance and fear,
The weak men of the world persuade the Gods;
And smiling with a mild and undeceived
Despair, he sees the strong men of the soul
Enforce the times to their discomfiture,
And, of the primal stuff of circumstance,
With which the long life of a common man
Is very comfortably compromised,
Contrive their stately and remorseless ruin!

Yes!.....he discerns, beyond his private fault
And failure, — when the game is played, and lost, —
Where thought turns sick and dizzy and dismayed
On the black borders of its own abyss, —
How all men living are not ever free,
But straitly prisoned in the Mystery,
Burdened beneath the universal strength,
Merged in the flux of dark infinities.....
Which are the Gods! — in whose relentless grasp
The strong man strives and strangles and is slain.
Then, to his humour, men resemble most
Dull creatures who live down at the dense, dark,
Fathomless, dumb foundations of the sea, —
Who, if they are not pliant, and too weak,
Too yielding to resist, are broken and burst,
Crushed out of life under the passionless,
Insuperable weight of the element
In which they live and move and have their being.
Are we not justly, then, and terribly
Enough — however much we see the joke! —
Cautioned to bear with wise humility
The utmost rigours of unyielding chance,
And meet the serious issues of the soul
As I have done — with a mild gayety,
An unambitious mind and a lax will!
So may we prosper to some worldly end;
So may we gain assured maturities
And aptitudes for a well-ordered life;

So, in the lesson of many years, at last,
We earn some sense of what the Gods can do,
At best or worst, to ruin or redeem.
And therefore, by the witness of his words
Last night, I find our Herakles imperilled
Not by the Gods but by himself alone! —
For the strong man no calculus computes,
No reason reckons, no arithmetic
Demonstrates or foresees by any means.
Only we know there is no mortal peril
So dire, so desperate as to be strong!

AMPHITRYON

You are the King! and may, by word and deed,
Give aid and counsel to my son.

CREON

Alas!.....
Who is a King to counsel or advise,
To help or hinder, if a man's free will
Furthers and guides and justifies his being?
The strong receive no help as they are strong;
They spare not — and they are not ever spared
By Gods or men; the counsel of the wise,
The tender tears of love's solicitude,
Cannot deter them or persuade them home!
Alas! Strength is a hazard none may share,
A genius none may caution or advise.

The strong man and the humble man are twain
By the one real division of men's lives
And destinies: there a great gulf is fixed,
A dark abyss no rainbow-bridge can span,
Between life's level places of brief hopes,
Familiar ways, and measurable ends,
And the starred skies of thought's imagination.
To you my kingship seems a proper prize
For life's fulfilment; — but last night we learned
How the ambitious soul scorns to deserve
Life's facile, fortunate prosperities.
I think to such a one the purpose of
His will, the strength that marks his isolation,
Are to him as a passion — as a vision
Of truth, which gives his strange soul liberty
To flame its furtherance thro' the wise world!.....
Vainly for his advantage we discern
How, soon or late, with ancient irony,
The wise world, sitting at the spectacle,
Hails his surrender or his helpless ruin.
For when the mad light dawns, the waking soul
Endures no lesson save its own, receives
No truth save what itself exemplifies!

Suddenly the POET and the WOMAN appear in the open space before CREON. They are so self-absorbed that they seem unconscious of the world about them.

SEVENTH SCENE

The POET

My heart is nervous like a place of peril.....

The WOMAN

My heart is quiet like a place of peace.
I see the light; I know he is the Lord.

The POET

Faintly I feel the promise of the Dawn
Pale on the prison windows of the soul;
And I believe, secluded in his strength,
Dazed in his light, it well may be the Lord
Is waking in the house of Herakles!.....
Whose faith shall perfectly shine out to help
My unbelief?.....Whose witness is at hand
To certify the Truth and prove the Lord?.....

He looks about him and realizes where he is.

This is the Agora.....The King — the world —
The envoys of Eurystheus — all are here!
And we are here, who keep his vigil! — and
Hither, at last, the man shall grandly come!.....

CREON

Stranger, be welcome! By your chance strange words
I dare surmise you come from Herakles?

The POET turns and faces CREON.

The POET

After a moment's silence

O King!—you, who are old; whose eyes have seen,
Borne on the shoulders of subjected men,
The little pageant of the world go by,
Pontifical and proud, with Gods and gold
And bright caparisons of victory—
And nothing come of it!—whose ears have heard,
Beyond the high, hard music of the march,
Beyond the chorus and the canticles,
The strange, strained sob of the great human heart,
Crushed and subdued against the iron breast
Of life's obscure, supreme necessities,—
The wailing and the bitter, broken cry
Of souls disconsolate and lives foredoomed
To ruin and intolerable wrong
From Gods and men—and nothing come of it!—
You, who may haply, in your whole long life,
Once and at last have dreadfully discerned
The infinite, inscrutable darkness
Bounding the narrow precincts of the mind,
And the old, awful taciturnities,
Against whose smooth, impenetrable walls
The shouting and the singing voice of life
Shatter and die and are not heard beyond—
And nothing come of it!—O you, whose mind
Is wise with the long audience and vigil
Your life has been—and nothing come of it!—

What is your faith, and what shall be my hope
Of Herakles? Is it the very light
Of truth, the very strength of the soul's cause,
This woman has discerned radiant in him?
Is he the very guide our souls have sought
Out of the labyrinth? Is he the Saviour?—
Give me your faith, for I am sick with doubt.....
Are not the dire, dark Gods, the bitter Gods,
Ranged, leagued and armoured with the common world
Of crowds and Kings to work the man's undoing?
Well I discern where the blind, brutal hand
Of fortune stretches at him from the shadow.....
And soon the stroke shall fall!.....Is it too soon?
Speak!—can he bear the blow? and is he yet
Full-grown in strength, and, like a God, become
Invulnerable?—or must he yield at last?
Or die far on the frontiers, overwhelmed?.....
Speak! Speak! My spirit is irresolute,
Swift and unstable as a wind-swept flame!
Give me your faith; the crucial hour is near;
He comes! He comes!—and wilful of his cause,
Here shall the soul take issue with the world!

CREON

After a slight pause; in his most temperate tones

Stranger, be welcome none the less because
You tax the patience of philosophy,

And vex a man whose age and whose estate
Give him some reason for the world's regard.
Patience may suffer; but my sole concern
Is with the perfect humour of the thing;
And since you variously enhance the joke,
Be gladly welcome! I discern in you
That taint of a poetic eloquence,
Which is perhaps the fashion of your youth,
And therefore to be leniently endured,
Yet gives a special tinge of irony
To the reflective mind which hears you speak.
Believe me, you might well be rid of it,
And of your flourish and intemperance
Of fancy, which the sane sense wearies of.
Whatever hazard of man's life is toward,
The facts are still sufficient to the end
In sight,—and ends invisible are just
Mere myth! That you impute to me a faith,
And, for yourself, indulge some fervent hope
In what vague ventures of the frenzied mind
No soothsayer of dreams can clearly tell,
Charms me—as youth will charm us!—but we find
A smile to vex down such extravagance!
Alas! we have some serious cause to fear
That the unhappy mind of Herakles
Is raptured and estranged — resolved to take
Some final issues with the Gods and men.

But we have seen, what you at last may learn,
How such pretensions of the spirit fail, —
Whose victory, I take it, is your hope.
Life, like a candle in a starless night,
Brightens and burns, or flutters and is spent,
As man's wise weakness spares the guarded flame,
Or man's rash strength resolves in all despite
To lift his torch into the spacious winds,
To blaze his path across the darknesses,
And force the elements to his own undoing.....
Only the strong go forward — and are slain!
Only the strong, defenceless, dare — and die!
Only the strong, free, fain and fearless, — fail!
Remember this! lest a worse thing than mere
Passion and ecstasy of poems befall you.

The POET

Old man, old vain mild phantom of a man! —
These many years there is no phrase of all
Your cowardly smooth wit, no attitude
Of yours I have not learned and wearied of!
Poor ancient, philosophic humourist!
I know you as you pitiably are:
Wise as the world is wise, — and ignorant
As only the dull, blatant world can be!
Tell me your lies no more, your clever lies!
Is there a man so dull he has not felt
The countless soldiery of circumstance

Charge down out of the dark against us all?
Is there a man so blind he has not seen
How fearfully the timid citizens
Of the wise world that you are master of
Armour their nakedness against the foe?
Is there a man so false he has not learned
How all in vain men dress against the shafts
Of truth their shadow-shields, and all in vain
Shape for their lives' defence the seeming gold
Of faith, the shallow silver of a sane
Philosophy,—to fit the cultured mind!—
The dull, stern bronze of patient hardihood,
Or any base alloy or mean deceit
Of weakness and respectability,—
However tried and tempered in the forge
Of the remembered usage of the world,
Fed with felled branches from the tree of time?
Is there a man so false and blind and dull
He does not know how all confinements yield,
All fashions of defence are overborne,
When the real truth's Redeemer is at hand,—
When, midst the very ruins of the House
Of Fear, the mighty soul finds place and room?.....
In the great game where each man's stake is set,
They only lose who dare not ever play
For the one prize that is not counterfeit—
And they must always lose! Only the strong
Go forward—and are saved! Only the strong,

Restless, defenceless, and companionless,
Dare — and supremely live! Only the strong,
Free, fearless, all-ambitious, — by so much
Come to the soul's sublime inheritance!
I asked no stale philosophy like yours,
Safe and sententious; and I am not apt
To take your dreadful humour, — which to me
Seems like the simper on a dead man's face!
Out of my soul's unrest I cried to you!
Out of my weakness and my heart's desire
I cried for faith, to you who had it not! —
For faith that here at last, come to his own,
Is the true, brave, divine, enfranchised man!.....
I seek my saviour! I am nothing more
Than a great voice crying upon his name,
Shouting his welcome, — for he surely comes!
My poems are the pure pæan of his advent —
And well I know he sleeps within myself!
Still, tho' I call him with a constant voice,
And, standing heart-sick in the twilight, fill
His glimmering casement with free flights of song,
He wakes not yet for all that I can do!.....
Therefore, O therefore is my hope alive
For the true man in whom the saviour wakes,
Who is my equal, — who is more than I!.....
Till, at his touch, the golden gates of light
Sunder! — till, suddenly, the pregnant soul
Wakes in the pangs of God's nativity!.....

CREON

Poor mad, mazed, dream-bedevilled, frenzied fool! —
'T is well my anger is no longer rash —

The POET

Mad to your sense I may be, — mad almost
As God is mad to those who know Him not!.....

Turning to the WOMAN

Woman, O Woman! what shall be my hope?
Would that my faith were perfect! Overlong
My heart has fed with blood the sacred flame;
Mine eyes have kept the consecrated vigil; —
And almost seemed magnificently at last
To witness to the coming of the Lord!.....
O might the tranquil eyes of wisdom read
Into the powers and prospects of the soul
A larger sense of what is possible
Than I have seen — and help my unbelief!

The voices of a great multitude sound, crying out in the distance.

The VOICES

Herakles! Herakles!

The POET

At last he comes!

CREON

Comes to relieve our small suspense, to end
The prologue and enact the — comedy!

SEVENTH SCENE

The POET

moving swiftly to a position close beside the throne of CREON and addressing him with an earnest intensity

Old man, forego your childish pleasantries!
Your cap and bells ring sadly out of tune
Amid the solemn and celestial choirs
Which sound across their clear antiphonies,
Now as the Hero — and, it well may be,
The Saviour — yea! the truth's Redeemer comes!
Put by your mannered, threadbare attitude;
Put by your trifling wisdom of the world;
Witness and understand! Your eyes and brain
May well be clear, — for age wears out the world
In man's regard, like some embroidered silk
Worn threadbare in the gradual waste of time,
And leaves a calm, transparent vacancy,
As of pale light over a hueless sea.
Watch! and it may be you shall read the news
And see into the secret!.....

The VOICES

nearer than before

Herakles!

Herakles! Herakles!

The POET

He comes! — O King,
He is that man from whose resplendent eyes,

But lately, to the woman who had faith,
The light of Gods shone out like a strange dawn!.....

The VOICES
always nearer

Herakles! Herakles!

The POET

Behold him well!
I — I have seen his strength, and half-believed
That he is of the few indomitable
Whom the Gods hardly bring into dominion
By any means! — till I have seemed to hear
Sound in my soul the trumpets of his triumph!.....

The VOICES
close at hand

Herakles! Herakles!

The POET

He is at hand!.....
The Bridegroom comes!..... O Heart! O Paranymph!
Let the sealed gates of love stand wide asunder,
And all the bounds of faith perish away!
And let the winged soul, from its lonely skies,
Cry out in joy, claiming the victory!

Amid a great roar of welcome from the people and the soldiers, HERAKLES appears in the open space before the King. He is accompanied by MEGARA

and his Children, and followed by IOLAUS. He confronts the King and the cheering multitude in silence. Gradually the tumult subsides. Meanwhile the MESSENGERS OF EURYSTHEUS draw near the throne of CREON.

AMPHITRYON

Welcome, my son!

CREON

Thrice welcome, Herakles!
Messengers are come hither from the King
Of Argos, and will speak alone to you.

HERAKLES

It will not help that I should hear them now.
I have renounced all profits and concerns
And servitudes of proud and politic men;
For, in the strong fulfilment of my vision,
I am resolved hereafter to be free!
Therefore the envoys of Eurystheus
Now may depart in silence: I no more
Regard them, and I will not hear them now.
I must be diligent about my business,
Which brooks no more delay! — And know you well,
If you behold me now it is because
I have one thing in all the world, one thing
To all the world, and only one, to say:
Farewell!

Rumour among the people and soldiers. The King and those about him listen with anxious concern.

My heart, this one, brief, utmost time,
Returns to where it once went proudly home
And daily dwelt, — knowing no better place,
No more majestic mansion of desire,
No costlier love, — to bid you all farewell!
Farewell! I linger but to take my leave
Of all I loved; my soul is on its way;
I am impatient to begone; — farewell!
Farewell! My road is hence and hard and far;
And where it leads me I may haply learn;
And whither, if at all, it takes me home!.....
Now I but know I will be free to follow
In the steep way, my soul's way, to the light —
The light which dawns within me! O my friends —
Kin, soldiers, citizens — be well assured
That even in this mystic and majestic hour
The Lord is in my house — and wakes!.....At dawn,
Solving the heart's incertitudes, one came
To witness to the Lord and specify
His advent — and he wakes — and all is well!
I asked — and bountifully I have received;
I sought — and I have wonderfully found;
I knocked — and now the spacious and sudden doors
Splendidly open to my furtherance!.....
I must begone! Farewell, at last, farewell!
My heart is fain; my will is on the way;

And, from the soul's eternal secret source,
Issues a strength I hardly dare to feel
Within me and upon me! — such a strength
As drives the ploughshare of its great resolve
Across the little limits of this world,
And may endure no let of God or man
Cast in the fair-way of its rash ambition!.....

CREON

Now sounds the dread, mad voice whose sense is peril.

The POET

Now sounds the trumpet-call of hope, the cry
Of the enfranchised, strong, expectant soul!

HERAKLES

Comrades and friends — companions of my youth —
Lovers of mine, whose love was health and home,
Honour and happiness to me, — farewell!
Now may your eyes discern the mystic change!
Him you behold is not that Herakles
You knew, who armed you from the temple walls,
And captained you across the battlefields,
In the dark way of death, to victory!
I am no more, no more, — O valiant sons
Of Cadmus! O my soldiers! — as I was
That day we wrapped in winding-sheets of flame
Palace and parapet and pinnacle
And all the bastioned power of proud Orchomenos!

I go away into the light from you;
I leave you; I return no more..... And yet
You shall remember how it was with us
That day the hero and the host returned
Full-flushed, in triumph, with the Minyan spoil! —
When the pale women caught our dreadful hands,
Where the red blood dried black, and wreathed our swords —
Our sinister, soiled swords of victory —
With bridal flowers, and kissed our fierce, parched mouths,
And, weeping, laughed into our shining eyes
With eager lips, song-spent and tremulous!
You shall remember! — and I leave with you
That Herakles who bids you now farewell!

An immense clamour rises from the people. The soldiers, with cries of devotion and dismay, rush forward and surround HERAKLES. They even seize his garments with restraining hands.

O manhood — memories — mood of many days
Of well-companioned tasks and victories
And exultations and familiar joys,
Evoked, impassioned in your hearts and mine! —
How shall I bear to say farewell to you?
Brothers-in-arms — O comrades — faithful friends —
It is not as my heart wills — not my heart
Is turned from you-ward! — for God knows my heart

Is yearning and irresolute and aggrieved,
And will not leave you, and laments and loves
And dares not lose what life has held so dear!
Only I know there is no way for me
But my way, and no way but yours for you;
And all ways of the world are false and blind
And barred and bounded to a mean ambition,
Which knows no more magnificent prize than mere
Exclusive profits and prosperities;
And all ways of the soul are ways of truth,
Which whoso treads them out shall learn to know
What excellence there is within himself
Which finds no hope or having tolerable
That all men may not share on equal terms!
But since, when once revealed, the truth forever
Is irremediable; and since I know
You will not come with me out of the world;
And since I may not go away with you,
Back from my prospect and my path; — farewell!
What tho' the strong heart breaks to feel your love?
Yet will the soul, the waking soul, be free!.....

Turning swiftly to MEGARA

O let us hasten hence!

Turning again to the soldiers and people, and speaking as though to all the world

Farewell! Farewell! —
Now and forevermore!

Meanwhile the MESSENGERS OF EURYSTHEUS have approached. Now one of them advances alone toward HERAKLES.

The MESSENGER

O Herakles,
Wise is your purpose now to bid farewell
To all the world!

HERAKLES

Long since I took my leave
Of Kings and of the Messengers of Kings.

The MESSENGER

Wise is your purpose — for the proud fair days
And pleasant ways of life your feet have trod,
Are changed and ended to return no more.
Farewell — O bid farewell indeed to all
These high commandments, riches, fame and friends,
Honour and eager glories of the world!
Farewell — O bid farewell to happiness;
To home and wife and child a last farewell!

HERAKLES

Rashly you speak of what you know not of.
No man alive is justified to say
What things are fit for the self-centred soul.
I bid farewell to all that is not truth
And all enslavements of the soul, — but love

Of two hearts blent together to one end
Of ecstasy and truth's eternities,
Is a great thoroughfare of liberty
Wherein the soul may walk its way well-pleased!
I bid farewell to none who go their ways,
Strong and resolved, wherever the light is.
To you, but not to them whose way is love,
Whose love is truth, I bid a last farewell.

The MESSENGER

Vain are your words, and all your thoughts are vain,
And all your hopes! O bid farewell to love,
Farewell to friendship and to hope farewell,—
Farewell, a long farewell to liberty!
No more of all these things your life shall be
Made glad and great and good! — no more! no more!
But rather inconsolable solitude,
Hardship and hunger, shame and ill-report,
Vile words and bitter usage of the world,
Labour and servitude and sacrifice,
Vigil and vagrancy shall be your lot,
Your strength's achievement and your life's reward!

The POET
to the WOMAN, grasping her arm

Watch! for the death-grip comes,— more terrible
Than fear can image or despair conceive!.....

Watch! for the dark, fierce, dread, revengeful Gods,
Out of the shadow of the Mystery,
Launch the lean lightnings of their utmost wrath!

HERAKLES

Farewell to love?..... Farewell to liberty?.....
And what of truth?..... And what of life itself?.....
Enough! Enough! These idle, senseless words
Merely perplex my purpose. Go your ways!
I have too long delayed to hear you, — go!

The MESSENGER
advancing a step toward HERAKLES

Born homeless by your sire's misdeeds, outcast
And exiled kinsman of the Argive King, —
Herakles! Herakles! — by birth, by race,
By right his subject, — pause and hear me speak!
For I am charged to bear the King's commands
To you, his servant —

HERAKLES

Silence! By the Gods —

The MESSENGER

The Gods enforce you to your Sovereign's will!

CREON
to the POET

See how he glares!

SEVENTH SCENE

The POET

His eyes are like a cry
Of horror! — like a stricken, haunted place!.....

HERAKLES

to himself

.....Where is the light?.....the light?.....

To the MESSENGERS, with violence

Begone! Begone!
I know my lineage; but I have no care
Of crowds or crowns or human servitudes!
Your King's commands are senseless words to me;
Your vain pretensions like an idiot's dream!
Enough! Begone! I have my soul to seek,
My truth to learn, my liberty to win,—
And all my labours are as yet undone!

The MESSENGER

Where are your labours?

HERAKLES

Where the light is not
To bring the light; and where the way is shut
To open out the way; and where the house
Is tenantless to rouse the Lord within! —
There are my labours and my works are these!

The MESSENGER

By strict enforcement of Eurystheus' will
And stern commandment of the deathless Gods,
Yours are the labours of a subject man,
Yours are the tasks and toil of servitude!
For where Eurystheus bids your strength to serve,
There shall your works be done; and all shall reap
Plentiful harvests of your sowing, all
Shall profit where your single strength has earned!
And, from the world's avid and thrifty hand,
No wage shall you receive, even at last, —
And no thanksgiving.....

HERAKLES

Silence! —

The MESSENGER

Herakles!
Herakles! by my voice your Sovereign speaks!
Teach your rebellious knees to kiss the dust;
Learn to obey, and humbly serve his will!

HERAKLES

Silence! Begone! —

To himself

What voice of prophecy
Cries in my heart?.....I dare not know the truth,
Nor hear the secret answered in my soul!
It were too monstrous if the worst were true —

Too monstrous! I will doubt no more — and yet
Where is the light — my light?..... Where is the voice,
The one puissant voice of the soul's song?.....
Why am I left in darkness and alone,
Deserted and betrayed?..... Why do I feel
Shudder within me like a dreadful ghost
The superstition of a fatal thing?.....

The POET

I know the truth, I read the secret now!.....

CREON

starting to his feet

God! he will yield!.....

AMPHITRYON

My son!

MEGARA

My Herakles!

HERAKLES

turning upon her

You? — You? —

The POET

O were he strong enough to yield!

The WOMAN

throwing herself at the feet of HERAKLES

Lord, I believe!

HERAKLES

Your faith destroys me!

The WOMAN

Lord! —

Lord! — I believe!

HERAKLES

Then help my unbelief!
I dare not realize what the truth may be! —
So terrible it is, I half believe
There is some passing madness in my mind
By which the light is quenched, the voice is quelled!
Surely it must be so! I know but this,
I cannot see the light — and suddenly
All the serene and mighty symphonies
Of heart and brain and being are silent.....

The WOMAN

Lord!.....

Lord!.....I believe!

HERAKLES

.....The light returns — the voice!.....
I dare not understand!.....I dare not yield!.....

The MESSENGER
striking HERAKLES with his staff

Down in the dust, and do your master's will!

SEVENTH SCENE

The people and soldiers cry out with a mighty voice. With the swiftness of passion, HERAKLES wrests the staff from the hand of the MESSENGER and strikes him to the ground, where he lies insensible.

HERAKLES
utterly giving way to anger

Intolerable! Intolerable! — Beware,
O Gods, O Kings, O men who try me thus!
You play like children with a deadly thing!
That heart may learn to hate you which should love;
That strength may ruin which might best redeem!

Turning upon the two MESSENGERS who still confront him

Back to your kennel and your currish king!
I spare your lives which are not worth my pains!
Say to Eurystheus I may well return
From exile! — and should Herakles return,
Not one in Argos would survive to tell
The monstrous story of its devastation!.....
I would tear Tiryns from its base and cast
Its burned-out ruins on the Argive plain;
And in its place I would rear up a tower
Of the charred corpses of its citizens,
Welded in blood; and on its pinnacle
The pale head of Eurystheus should display
How he went down to death beneath my hand,

Frenzied with fear, forsaken, false, accursed! —
Go! while there still is mercy in me, go!

A great shout of relief and acclamation rises from the soldiers and people. The POET springs forward and confronts HERAKLES face to face.

The POET
shouting at HERAKLES

Coward and traitor! Traitor! —

He is roughly seized by the soldiers; struggling in their grasp, he turns to the WOMAN

Mourn! O mourn,
Daughter of desolation, mourn your loss!
O faithful heart! — Woman! — We are betrayed!
Alas! Alas! He is as one of us,
Who all are slaves and dare not undergo
The mighty labours of our liberation!
He too is abject, feeble, and afraid;
He too with mean economy prefers
The helot's hovel to the master's house;
He too will not afford the price of truth
Nor earn the soul's full freedom by his pains!

HERAKLES
fiercely, but dismayed

Whose voice assails me?

The POET

Mine!—which might have sung
Pæans and poems of you in exultation!

HERAKLES

Now by the Gods you well may die for this!.....

The POET

Slay if you will! Yet mind you well that he
Who slays himself in spirit and in truth,
Has done more murder than a sword can do!
I fear you not!—but fear me well you may,
Since I am one whose lips have learned to phrase
The truth's tremendous syllables of song!
Coward and traitor!—you have quenched the light
Of truth and shut the door of liberty!

HERAKLES stands, sobered and dizzy as from a blow. The soldiers begin to drag the POET away; he turns once more to the WOMAN.

Daughter of desolation, mourn your loss!
Weep, for the Child is slain! He slays the Child,
The Child of Light, about whose mystic birth
You were the mid-wife and the ministrant!.....

The WOMAN
to HERAKLES, with agony

Lord, I believe!

HERAKLES

What faith can make me whole?.....

The POET

as he is dragged away by the soldiers

Coward and traitor! — Traitor! —

His voice is suddenly silenced; he disappears. HERAKLES stands, heedless of everything; silent, sick, uncertain.

End of the Seventh Scene.

EIGHTH SCENE

Later of the same day. An open space before a Temple situated on an acropolis in Thebes. The gay tumult of a public holiday rises from the city, which lies out in panorama not far below.

The POET and the WOMAN, alone.

EIGHTH SCENE

The POET

We two in all the world have tears for him!.....
Hark! how they make a public festival
And cry thanksgiving that the God is slain.....

He pauses. The WOMAN is silent. The rumour from the city sounds louder than before.

Yes, they rejoice! — an excellence is lost,
And so their triumph is securely won!
Hark! how they mock with mirth the soul's defeat,
These dreadful, dread majorities of men
Who shout into the air and beat their hands
At pageants, tragedies, and crucifixions; —
Who, when a soul surrenders, sound across
Truth's broken harmonies their rank applause!

The cries of the multitude sound nearer.

Hark! Hark! They come — wreathed, radiant, unashamed!
Their drums sound hither where the mourners sit,
Sanctified, silent in their mystic grief,
About the gravestone of the earth-born God!
And whensoever, from the huddled homes,
The congregations and the courts of men,

One, rising up from where he sat so long
In darkness with the wise men of the world,
Finds God incarnate in his inmost soul,
And feels across the vision of his eyes
The unimagined, strong, seraphic light,
And speaks his mystic message thrilled with song,—
Then will you hear sound out against the man
The world's ironic, base, and vacant voice,—
The tuneless tumult of democracies!
So, when the soul is crushed, defeated, slain,—
O then as now, toward the crystalline
Unmindful heaven's serene immensity,
From all the nameless numbers of the world
Thunder their triumph and their acclamations!.....

A great, gay multitude of men and women, with CREON and AMPHITRYON at their head, appear on their way from the city to the Temple.

Not even here is sanctuary.....Behold!
They come to thank the Gods that God is slain!

CREON, on his way, perceives the POET and pauses.

CREON

Here's our poetic, pale enthusiast,
Changed from his madness, sobered, let us hope,
And somewhat wiser. Ah, how vain were all
Our hopes and fears! He merely boasted! What?—
Believed his boast, you say?—I grant you! Well,

And what of that? True faith's the only harm!
For much as Herakles was crazed by dreams,
So in their lives are many men deceived, —
And by their disenchantment much matured!
Thus we discern when excellence is lost
How much is saved, — our hero first of all!
And last, but not, good sir, believe me, least,
We now may pleasantly observe how well
Our sense of humour and our quiet smile
Of irony still vindicate their use,
And prove life's ablest critics after all!

The POET listens with quiet indifference. CREON turns and enters the Temple with AMPHITRYON. The multitude follow. The POET and the WOMAN are left once more alone.

The WOMAN

I will not now believe that all is lost!.....

The POET

Nothing is lost! — for he was not the Light;
He was but one whose strength had momently
Uplifted in his hand the kindled torch
Whereof the spark lives quenchless in the soul.
Fail not in faith because the torch-bearer
Is fallen! — the sacred flame still lives in splendour,
Tho' the lax hand let fall the lamp that made
To our gross sense the glory visible!.....

The WOMAN

I know no light but his, no faith but him.
He held the torch up in my darknesses;
He gave me light where the long path went on;
And where his strength made room, there was my way!.....
Strong and serene as sunrise, I beheld
His advent; and, the little while he tarried,
The common clay I am of life's admixture
Seemed all suffused and interchanged with gold!.....
What shall my life become if he is gone?.....
And what is truth?.....and why are all the free
Fine faculties of the impassioned mind?.....
And wherefore has the heart such wings of faith,
Such springs of love, such hardihood of hope,
If he is gone? — I will not so believe!
He is still forward, still sublime, still strong!.....

The POET

Alas! Alas! I dare not hope — I saw
The Spirit labouring in him, as life labours
In one who dies too young.....The light was spent;
The voice was still! Alas! I know too well
The secret signs: — how often, in my house
Daily rekindled, daily have I seen
The light dying, dying, — the sacred flame
Burn small into the common day of life!
How often I — I also, silently

And suddenly have seen those walls, that make
The mansion of the Spirit's isolation,
Wear thin as light, and, like a prodigy,
The dayspring of the soul flush thro'! — till all
This mortal man was like a lantern held
Aloft, alight in the vast night of being;
And wayfarers might find their way withal!
I too have lit my candle at the sun,
And made my poems of it till the light failed!.....
Made only poems! — yet more than he shall make,
Who is grown dark as any proud glad man;
Whose light is quenched in passion and fierce deeds;
Whose soul is spent in purchase of this world;
Whose strength is small; whose truth is partisan!
Alas! Alas! there is no room for hope.....

The WOMAN

I will not so believe! They are not dark,
His eyes, where once my sightless eyes discerned
Spacious and grave nativities of light!
He is not, in the dust with other men,
So all inexpiably and weakly fallen
From where he stood, aureoled, invincible!.....

The POET

You love him!

The WOMAN

I?.....I dared not! Love? — O God!

I had not strength enough nor grace of soul
Nor grandeur in my heart to love him with!
Could I have loved him all might now be well!.....

The POET

Can you imagine of the human heart
Such prodigies? — that love could so avail
The soul once purposed to the ends of truth,
Which fears and palters with the price?.....Enough!
Let us go hence before the worshippers
Return to vex our grief and solitude.
Let us go hence.

The WOMAN

.....and seek for Herakles!

The POET and the WOMAN depart. A moment later HERAKLES appears, coming up from the city. He pauses by the Temple steps, gazing abroad over the immense prospect.

HERAKLES

I dimly see how far perfection is,
And what the utmost price of truth must be,
And how the strong soul is companionless.....
And I am heart-sick in my hour of weakness!
I have been much and soon and fiercely tried,
And now the process of the pregnant past
Yields to my sense its stern significance! —

I was a tranquil householder, whose house
Of life seemed so securely locked and barred
That at the feast and in the pleasant mansions
How should he fear to find the fatal guest—
The Truth, whose voice sings out the wonder-song
Of life and death adventured to one end;
Whose eyes are clear, whose brows are pale with stars,
Whose nakedness is bright and terrible?.....
Yet, in the rashness of my discontent,
My hands, impatient of the tasks and toys,
Breached the blind walls of life's secure defence
And gave glad welcome to the ambushed foe!
Now am I pressed and overborne, as one
Beleaguered in a ruined citadel;
I am invaded, violated! — all
The doors stand open of my dwelling-place;
My heart is sacked and spoiled without reprieve,
For all may pillage in its treasuries;
The feast no more is spread but Truth is there
To consecrate the wine of human love
And transubstantiate life's daily bread;
And in the mansions I can sleep no more
Because of one crying "It is the Dawn!" —
I was a thrifty husbandman who tilled
With patient labour life's familiar fields,
And gathered in the harvest to his small
And well-approved and insufficient needs; —
But when the narrow bounty of my tillage

No more sufficed to give me nourishment,
Eager of more superb prosperities,
I drove my ploughshare with a reckless hand,
Furrowed the fallow acres of the soul,
And in new soil of strange fertilities
Cast down the good seed of a great ambition!
Now in my soul the ripened harvest stands,
Waiting the sickle, — and my hands must reap
And earn perfection's lordlier livelihood! —
Leaving unsown, unscythed, unharvested,
The humble fruit of human happiness
Which was the substance of my daily bread,
And all my life long made the staff of life.
I was a happy lover, innocent
And candid in the paradise of love;
And love was human and was happiness —
Until I dreamed of the celestial Bride!.....
Then were my heart's inviolate secrecies
Disclosed — and I beheld her fabled face!.....
I saw how young she was and beautiful!.....
I knew her love's ineffable ecstasies!.....
And all the lesser loveliness of earth
Was in my sight no more desirable.
Then, like a bridegroom, heedless on his quest
If the dark way be strange and unexplored
Or if the bridal chamber have no light,
I hastened to my Paramour — I kept
Love's secret assignation with my soul!

Now of that whispered, dark embrace is born,
In the deep womb of thought, a prodigy
Whose strength shall dispossess me of this world!.....

CHORUS OF RESPONDENTS
from within the Temple

We fear Thee and we know Thee not!.....
We know but this, when all is said:
That life is false and forfeited,
And love foregone and truth forgot
To serve Thee whom we dare not trust;
While, vexed with very sore distress,
We go nowhither in the trampled dust
Of life, companioned yet companionless.....
Yet still we serve Thee — as we must! —
Serve Thee and suffer and atone
And daily fear Thee and confess
The Kingdom and the Glory and the Power
Are only Thine — not ours but Thine alone!
For we are meek in spirit,
And live like creatures of the transient hour
Who dare not strive and suffer to inherit
The birthright of the soul, — who dare not be
Perfect as Thou art and, as Thou art, free!
No hopes may tempt us; and for us in vain,
Globed like a golden lamp suffused in rain,
The candid, living fruit upon the tree
Of knowledge, and the prime, pressed grapes of love

Which brim with sacred wine life's earthen bowl,
Ripen in sun-steeped orchards of the soul!.....
We are incurious, pious and afraid
And have no care thereof,
So the small price of all we lose is paid.
Therefore, as Thou art just,
Give and forgive! —
Forgive our trespasses, and as we humbly live,
Give us our daily bread!
By Thy small mercies we confirm our trust:
And since so much is forfeit that perchance
Man might reclaim as his inheritance,
Scant not to our desire
The mess of pottage that we ask instead!
But, in abundant measure,
Give us the trifle of our hire, —
The pride, the fame, the kingships and the gold,
The paltry profit and the hasty pleasure,
For which, to further and fulfil
The dark stern process of Thy secret will,
The soul, the truth, the strength of man are sold!

HERAKLES

Pathos — humility — surrender — fear! —
Starved, sterile, satisfied, supremely sad
Human vociferation and appeal! —
O frightened children, crying in the dark! —
Be well assured this hour of lamentation,

Of weakness and despair shall pass away!
Unconquerable is the strength within me — soon,
Soon to revive! — and spares not, neither counts
The cost!..... O I begin to be afraid
Of what I am! — for if I live at all,
I must reclaim the Birthright and redeem
The Spirit and the Truth from servitude!
Servitude? — then, the labours? — and Eurystheus? —
No, by the Gods, it is not to be borne!
And in the very thought of that abasement
Lies only madness and a black despair!.....

The voice of the POET
from below

How shall we learn to bear what must be borne?
How shall the heart not break when love is lost?
How shall life earn enough to pay the cost
Of all the tears, the solitude, the scorn?
How shall we not be utterly forlorn
When they deny us whom we cherished most?
When all life was becomes a dreadful ghost,
How, from such pangs of death, is life reborn? —
How shall we live at all?..... Thou canst not say,
O Heart, whose voice is lamentation! Where,
Where are the nobler virtues that repay,
When all is gone that gave us most delight?
When shall the soul, from what supernal height,
Witness the truth and save us from despair?

Before the voice of the POET is still, a very old blind man, led by a shepherd boy, appears coming up from below. At the same moment CREON and AMPHITRYON, followed by the multitude of worshippers, appear upon the Temple steps.

The OLD MAN

Is there a man who hears me? If there be,
Let him, as one who loves the Delphic God,
Straitly direct my steps —

CREON

Teiresias!

TEIRESIAS

Surely I know the accents of the King.....

CREON

Servant of Loxias, wherefore art thou come?
Thou, in whose sightless eyes the God has fixed
The fearful vision of all future things,
Speak, if thy words concern the fate of Thebes!

TEIRESIAS

Creon, I come not in the public cause.
Yet, I beseech you, guide me, that the will
Of God may be accomplished; and direct
My steps, that I may speak, as God commands,
His words to Herakles.

EIGHTH SCENE

HERAKLES

To Herakles? —
What is your message? Speak! — for be assured
If God is I will know His will with me!

TEIRESIAS

You are that Herakles? — O wretched man!

HERAKLES

Wretched?.....

TEIRESIAS

Most wretched of the sons of men
Is he who breaks the bonds of human fate
And dares the soul's transcendent destiny!
He shall, alone of all men, nevermore
Rest and arise refreshed from rest; rejoice,
Love, live, and have his happy human being,
As a man may, in life's familiar place
Where sleep is sweet and toil repaid and tears
Consoled and man's imperfect nature soothed
And satisfied, man's unambitious mind
Content, man's insufficient heart fulfilled!.....
For all his life is lost to save his life;
And all he loved is sacrificed and slain
To make love pure and perfect in his heart! —
Until at last, released from servitude
By long, incredible labours and the strength
That sleeps not, neither spares, the soul is left

Naked with knowledge, where the lapse of time
Leaves its eternity unhazarded,
Solitary in a waste and desert place, —
Where once the friendly cities rose in towers,
And, rich with harvests, hills and pleasant gardens,
The humble paradise of human life
Prospered and heard no tidings of the soul!.....

HERAKLES

O breaking heart! — Is there no hope at all
Of any tolerable issue?.....

TEIRESIAS

Peace!
Hear me, for I declare the words of God! —
I stood upon the mountain, and the voice
Of God spoke in my soul, saying: "It dawns!.....
My light dawns in the soul of Herakles!.....
Faint and afar his eyes have seen the Light;
His heart receives the gracious and divine
Nativity, and radiant is his mind
With rapture, and he hails the light with joy!
He feels a splendour in his strength; he sees
Burn with clear flame the torch of his resolve;
The door of his deliverance stands wide
Asunder in the vista of his vision;
His hope is on the way; his faith is full;
His winged ambition soars into the sun!....."

EIGHTH SCENE

HERAKLES

So, in the Dawn of Light, it was with me!.....

TEIRESIAS

The voice of God spoke in my soul, saying:
"Man is not saved because he sees the truth:
He must be true before his task is done!
Dawn crimsons on the mountain crest of thought,
While still inert, disfranchised, unredeemed,
The substance and the self of human being
Lie far below in that sepulchral night,
Wherein, like spectres moving in a trance,
Like candles briefly kindled and consumed,
The countless unambitious multitudes
Of mortal men exist at all adventure,
Timid and credulous of what they seem,
Fostered or blasted by the winds of chance.
Therefore, tho' Herakles has seen the Light,
The long captivities of ignorance
And pain and force and fear constrain his soul:
He has not even reckoned with the price,
Nor counted with the cost of liberty;
He has not learned how much the flame consumes
Which purifies, — how much the light dissolves
Which shows the truth, — how much perfection is,
To all imperfect, happy, human things,
Ruin and desolation!....."

HERAKLES

Desolation.....
Ruin.....And then, redemption?.....

TEIRESIAS

Hear the voice
Of God! — it cries out in my spirit, saying,
"More light! More light! More truth for Herakles! —
Light to dissolve, perfection to destroy,
Truth to lay waste and ruin and make smooth,
Make straight and smooth the pathway of the soul!.....
Haste! — lest the saviour and the soul be lost,
Man's birthright forfeit, and the soul's supreme
Ambition bartered for a little thing!
Haste! — and exhort the man enslaved to wear
No more the chains of his captivity!
There is no virtue he shall not forego
Who fears and palters with the price of truth;
There is no excellence or liberation
He shall not earn who dares to undergo
The mighty labours and the sacrifice
Which win the soul's way out of servitude!"

HERAKLES

Where is the God who bade your steps come hither,
Your voice speak out the doom of Herakles?
Where is the God? — unless within the soul
Of man divinity resides unborn.....

EIGHTH SCENE

Why do you seek to cheat me with a phrase
And thwart my understanding with a name?
It is your voice I hear and yours alone! —
Blind, wretched Soothsayer — where is the God?

TEIRESIAS

Bear with him, Loxias, for his agony
Is more than mortal grief!

HERAKLES

Where is the God?
Where is the God? — if God there be at all!

CREON

Haply at Delphi, in his sacred house.

TEIRESIAS

God dwells wherever He is well received
And welcome in the life and soul of man.

HERAKLES

Delphi?.....At Delphi I will seek the God!
And if He is, and man may find him out,
There will I meet him face to face at last!.....

End of the Eighth Scene.

NINTH SCENE

Before the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.
HERAKLES stands alone near the steps of the Temple.

NINTH SCENE

HERAKLES

I left them in the quiet house — my sons,
My woman and my whole heart's happiness!.....
And all my life, and all my self that was
The world's great Captain in its little wars,
The pride and praise of men, I left behind!
Now, standing here by this prophetic shrine,
I am alone and exiled and bereaved,
I am forsaken, heart-sick, comfortless,—
I am resolved to read the riddle out
And search the secret till I understand!.....
Lost am I — lost! I know not where I am;
I know not where I go; — but whence I come
I know too well! — O this is all my guidance:
The passion to be other than I am
And realize self in the strict terms of truth!
The light is not — and yet the twilight is
About me, glimmering like a moonlit mist.....
And like a ghost I walk unreconciled,
Dubious and undetermined and forlorn,
Fearing the day, yet longing for the light!
O promised Dawn! — when you are come at last,
What shall your light disclose? — some spectacle

Of tragic desolation, — lonely days
And loveless nights and long, laborious,
Monstrous, intolerable servitudes? —
Or shall I stand at once, as I have dreamed,
With all I love in the high place of Peace,
Dilate as with the Universal being,
Filled and fulfilled with your serenities?.....

The great doors of the Temple slowly open. In the dark twilight of His house the shrine of the God and the veil behind it are dimly visible. The PROPHETES appears upon the threshold. HERAKLES turns his face toward him.

The PROPHETES

What voice of wretchedness and wild unrest
Cries out before the House of God?

HERAKLES

My voice
Knew not the tones and tears of grief till now!
After a life of strength and high resolve
This is my hour of doubt and blind appeal,
This is my hour of agony!.....

The PROPHETES

The God
Knows neither lamentation nor unrest:
His calm perfection hears no human voice.

NINTH SCENE

HERAKLES

There is one voice He shall not choose but hear!

The voice of the PYTHIA

sounding in ecstasy from behind the veil within the Temple. As she speaks a CHORUS of men and women, worshippers of the God, assemble upon the Temple steps.

Before the House of God
They grieve and they rejoice
Whose utmost light is of the common day,
Whose aimless feet along the trampled sod
Tread the strait precinct of the public way,
Whose lives are like a pageant passing by.....
Within the House of God
No ear receives their incoherent voice;
No eye
Is witness to the deeds their days have done!
Like mummers at a carnival
They flaunt their scant disguise, and one by one
Go out into the dark in silence, after all.....

The CHORUS

Only a windy light no eye perceives;
Only a thrill of joy, a pang of grief;
Only a voice crying where silence is,
Where none respond and the brave song is brief;
Only the plaything of blind destinies,

Which ends in nothing as it once began; —
So is the life of man!

The PROPHETES

There is no shadow of imperfect things
Cast on the glory of God's excellence:
Filled with eternal light, His rapt regard
Perceives no grieved, importunate human face!

HERAKLES

There is one face He shall not fail to see!

The CHORUS

We live upon the threshold of His house,
And there like children sport with idle things;
We are a voice that weeps, a voice that sings,
A hand that traces in the senseless dust
The little hazard of our happenings.
Ours is a time for turmoil and carouse;
Ours is a time for sickness, sleep, and tears,
Labour and laughter, love and lust;
Ours is a time to come, a time to go!.....
Yet fearfully we feel, dimly we know
That all the while we live, thro' all our years,
Which run out, futile and disused, before
The threshold of His holy House, the door,
Dark with the gloom of unfamiliar fears,
Behind us, ever and alway,
Waits to receive us!..... Yet we dread

To turn our feet from the strait way they tread!
Yea! tho' our hearts, unsatisfied, are rife
With doubts and questions that will not depart,
We dare not ask or seek or knock
Or lay strong hands on the unguarded lock.
Rather from day to day
We cheat the mind with work and dreams and strife,
We cheat the love-sick heart
With passion and blind love that perisheth,—
Until from all our toys we are taken away,
And in unspeakable loneliness depart!.....
Then, thro' the door of destiny and death,
Which is the door of truth's eternal life,
We men, whose times were squandered on the sill
Of the soul's dwelling-place,—
Who found not virtue, strength, or will
To slant the door and meet Him face to face,—
Unborn, unwaked, unwise, and comfortless,
Pass from life's nothing into nothingness!.....

HERAKLES

Children of men, there is one voice of power
He shall not choose but hear; one fearless face
He shall not fail to see!—My voice shall call
To rouse the Lord; my hand shall slant the door;
Mine eyes shall meet Him face to face at last!.....

The PROPHETES

None can endure the grandeur of His gaze;
None can receive the splendour of His speech!

HERAKLES

There is one eye His glance shall not confound!
There is one soul His speech shall not appal!

The CHORUS

Behind us and before us
The shadow is,
Whose incommensurable silences
Never make answer to life's thundered chorus.....
And in our hands we bear the little light
Of life across the huge and haunted night
A windy mile or so;
And whence we come and whither we shall go
We know not and we fear to know!.....

The voice of the PYTHIA
as before

Yet may the inward eye perceive,
Hardly, and thro' the darkness faint and far,
Truth's single, stedfast star;
And learn, by vigil, to receive
The light; and, careless of the goal,
In the divine impatience of the soul,
Forfeit all hopes and fears to follow on!.....

Yet may the heart's unuttered love believe
That somewhere the majestic sun
Of knowledge shines on calm immensities,
And drowns in light death's dark infinities!.....
Yet may the restless mind at last devise
Some scale and measure for the worth of things,
And rise, and valorously depart,
Led by the vision of the inward eyes,
Flushed with the rapt assurance of the heart,
Wearied and scornful of their parleyings,
Their dreams and games and profits, who before
The threshold of the shadowed door,
Build of base earth their human paradise! —
Yet may a man, at length,
Feel in the secret sources of his strength
The power to ask, to seek, to knock,
To force, if need be, the unguarded lock,
And, in the solitude where none else are,
To set the great, dark door ajar,
And live, and enter, and with words of power rouse
The Master of the House!

The CHORUS

It may be, as the Spirit saith,
That whoso slants the shadowed door,
Thereafter, deathless at the core,
Pursues his way thro' life and death
As one who walks an endless road,

Chequered with sun and shade, to some ineffable
abode!.....
It may be, as our dreams aver,
Beyond the door which none have passed,
The asker and the answerer,
The seeker and the truth, at last,
Are single and supremely one!.....
It may be, when the gate is won,
That whoso stands within the door
Exults with love's transcendent youth
In calm eternities of truth
Where, as with God's immortal breath,
The soul forever and forever quickeneth!.....
But we, whose lives are spent before
The threshold of the House of God,
We only know it is not thus
Ever for one of us!
Rather we know not what is worst or best,
And we are wearied, and we find no rest,—
And there is haply rest beneath the sod!.....
Therefore, as life has taught us, so we deem
Time is the little way from birth to death
Which flowers and stars and countless men have trod
And found no reason of their wretchedness,
No pondered justice first or last,
No light to guide, no Saviour to redeem!
So, in the passion of our heart's distress,
Our minds inert, incurious, and afraid,

Receive the witness of the woful past
And worship at the shrines our fathers made.
And well we know, when all is said,
Tho' faith and hope caress their dream,
That life and death and sorrow and loneliness
Do something more to us than merely seem!

HERAKLES

O Children! — O my frightened Children! — Peace!
Children of men, it is not as you deem! —
Hear me! — I say life palters with the price
Of Truth's for-everlasting gift and grace! —
I, in my hour of weakness, I have dealt
In mean economies, and sapped my strength,
And vexed the soul's resolve with lamentation!
I too have feared and suffered! — and even now
I am afraid — I suffer — I am not strong!
I see before me with a black despair
The prospect of my desolation! — Yea,
And worse, it may be, if the worst come true! —
The prospect of a life's intolerable,
Infamous servitude!..... And in my mind
There is a kind of madness without name
Even to think of it, — and a red mist
Of blood drowning the vision of mine eyes!.....

He pauses; then speaks again. As he speaks, he mounts the steps and crosses the threshold of the Temple.

Children of men, I bring you somewhat more

Than hope! Mine eyes have sundered darknesses.....
I have beheld the star of truth and seen
The sun of knowledge dawn over the soul.....
I have devised ascending gyres of thought,
And climbed into the prospect of perfection.....
I have turned inward from the spectacle
And florid insignificance of what
The rank world reckons as the life of man,
And set my strength against the shadowed door,
And come at last living into his house,
And called the Master with a mighty voice!
Him will I meet with face to face, and feel
His power, and hear His secrets in my ear!.....
And living as I go I shall return,
And bring you news and tidings of the Lord!.....

The PROPHETES

Forbear! No man may trespass in the House
Of God, lest desolation worse than death
Leave him bereaved and naked to the soul!
Forbear! — Inflexible as knowledge is,
Calm as perfection, merciless as truth,
So is the God — and no man may endure
His real presence and thereafter live!

The voice of the PYTHIA
as before

His Spirit is
Like a vase of diamond

Brimmed with eternal springs of living light.....
His heart of clear religious ecstasies,
Tranquil, transfigured, true humanities,
In love's grave gardens of divine delight,
Feels the immortal heart of life respond.....
His thought is spacious and serene
And like a consecrated place
Where knowledge is the soul of grace,
And truth alone is heard and seen.....
And who, with undiverted will,
As He is perfect dares to be,
And, in despite of grief and fear,
Has crossed alone the sacred sill,—
His voice He shall not choose but hear,
His face He shall not fail to see:
To him the very God is near!—
And, as his soul shall understand,
To him the Spirit and the Truth are close at hand!.....

HERAKLES makes a motion to advance into the Temple.

The PROPHETES

Forbear!

HERAKLES

Stern guardian of the Sacred Door,
I know the shining garments of the soul,
Which all must wear who enter in His house,
It well may be are robes of hueless flame
In which my human being and heart and even

This rugged vesture of mortality,
Which tempers truth and makes perfection mild,
Must perish away and all be quite consumed.....
Yet is there that within me which compels,
And will not rest, and is resolved to go!

While all wait in silence, HERAKLES enters the Temple, approaches the altar, rends the veil, and discloses the PYTHIA seated upon the tripod. He disappears into the darkness of the inner Temple. A moment later he reappears, overthrows the tripod, and comes to the door of the Temple, dragging with him the PYTHIA. He thrusts the PYTHIA forth upon the steps, and himself remains standing within the Temple door.

The shrine is empty! Speak, false prophetess!
Where is the God?

The PYTHIA

Where else but in His house!

HERAKLES

I am alone within the House of God!.....

The PYTHIA

in utmost ecstasy

Melt in His arms! Resist not! Care not! Strive
No more, for He is quiet and merciless;
And by His means shall naught grow less,
But all that is shall greater grow!.....

For, save with His transcendent life,
Within His mansions none may live;
And, as He prospers, even so
All thoughts and things, transfigured, thrive!
His truth is like a shining knife
Which slays, in sense and heart and brain,
Till what was perishable is slain —
And lives! — transmuted, born again
Dilate with His immortal breath!.....
He keeps no least account with pain,
With desolation, tears, and death!
Perfect and pure as knowledge is,
He has no private end to gain;
No covenant, no terms to make;
No silences
To keep; no death to fear; no heart to break!.....
Man's eyes are clouded with distress;
The heart of man is vexed and twain;
The mind of man is caged and caught,
Nor dares with lifted wings go free; —
His eyes are quiet as calm dawns at sea,
And single, and His heart is one;
His perfect love is pitiless,
And asks no less than all that man can give,
And will not suffer that man come to naught,
And will not punish or forgive;
His mind, like some majestic sun,
Centres the vast, expanding gyres of thought!.....

Melt in His arms and cease from strife!.....
He wakes!.....He lives!.....The Lord has come,
And all is glorified thereof!
Melt in His arms! — and, for the larger life,
Forfeit the life you cherished and the love
That once was all your happiness and home!
At last the Lord of Love and Life appears,
And, in His being's excellence,
The little life of hopes and fears,
The little love of self and sense
Dissolve — exalted to magnificence!

HERAKLES
to the PYTHIA, almost in appeal

Who is the Lord — the God? — and where is He? —

The PYTHIA
as before

Who asks is answered by His voice;
Who dares advance is on the road;
Whose soul is free and fain to choose,
Has made the truth's transcendent choice;
Who seeks the God has found the God;
Who knocks is Master of the House!

HERAKLES
with a great cry

Mine is the desolation and the death!

NINTH SCENE

The PYTHIA

as before

Yours is the resurrection and the life!

HERAKLES

I am the God!

The PYTHIA

as before

There is no God but I!—
I am whatever is!
I am despair and hope and love and hate,
Freedom and fate,
Life's plangent cry, Death's stagnant silences!.....
I am the earth and sea and sky,
The race, the runner and the goal;
I am the part and I the whole; —
There is no thought nor thing but I!
Children, behold! — the East is white!
I see it dawn across the dark! —
I see the daybreak of the light
That truth has kindled in the conscious soul!
And hark, my Children! — O my Children, hark! —
For nearer now, and yet more near,
And still afar, and wordless still, I hear
The music of the soul's puissant voice
Rejoice
With festival in the heart and ecstasies
For man's deliverance!

Therefore cry welcome! for the Master is
Come to His own divine inheritance!
Cry welcome! for the Lord of all,
The Love, the Life, the Strength is come —
The rightful Heir, the Prodigal,
After long exile, now returneth home!

The CHORUS

Strophe I

Truly we care not for the truth,
We care not and we dare not care; —
But life and love and health and youth,
These things, we know, are sweet and fair!

Antistrophe I

Yet love is false, and life is brief,
And youth and health and hope depart,
And troubled is the human heart
With fear and agony and grief.

Strophe II

And why life is we dare not ask,
And what is death we dare not guess;
In doubt, despair, and weariness
We shirk the truth's unending task.

Antistrophe II

It may be that the truth repays
Thought's endless toil to reach its goal;

It may be God is in the soul,
And wakens after many days.....

Epode

But we have neither part nor lot
With truth's far-sought and fabled grace:
Wherever is God's dwelling-place,
In all our lives we find Him not!

HERAKLES

Coward and weak and abject!.....O my Soul!—
How long the dark persuasion of my fears
Has wrought deception, and consoled the heart
With lies of some conceivable escape!.....
How long even I have dreamed false dreams of God,
As of some other than the self I know,
To whom might meanly, secretly be shifted
The endless labour of the soul's perfection,
The mystery of being, and the deep,
Unuttered meaning of the Universe!.....
Now, self-revealed, at last, and self-confessed
The Lord, alone responsible and real,
I stand defenceless, sleepless, undeceived,—
Naked before the truth!—What more is death
Than my bereavement and my solitude?
What more is death?—and what can death do more
Than rob the Spirit of its resting-place,

Its refuge of insensibility,
And leave it outcast, as my soul is left,
Doomed to incessant vigil and unrest?
What more is death? — for what is life, indeed, —
The life I lose to gain death's larger life, —
With all its needs and greeds and appetites,
Its florid hungers, its satieties,
Its humble hopes and gross credulities,
Than the dark cup of Lethe to the soul? —
A prison-house, in whose captivity
The soul finds rest and slumber and reprieve?
And now, no more! no more! — O nakedness!
O desolation! O bereavement! — Where,
Where shall the Spirit now go home to rest
From vigil in the twilight of the frontiers, —
From the brave light and the persuading darkness,
The boundless solitudes and passionless
Immensities of the awakened self?.....
Where shall the soul go home?..... And, even when
At last the mind's abysmal darknesses
Fill with some huge tranquillity of light,
How, in that revelation, shall the soul
Find place and reason and the forward path?.....
Where is there rest or comfort any more?
And whither shall the tasked adventurer
Find respite or reprieve? O nevermore,
No-whither shall he find the breast of sleep!
And know you well it is a bitter thing

To die — and in the thrilling solitude
Of death, to live — and labour, ever and ever
Afoot and sleepless with the vision of truth!
Life is a bitter thing to lose, and love
And home and wife and child and happiness
And rest and the contentment of mild joys
And small achievements and brief brilliant glories:—
These all are welcome and pleasurable things,
And bitter things to lose!.....And know you well
It is a bitter thing to go adrift,
Companionless and without pause or end,
Into the vast dark spaces of the soul;—
To dwell, sense-stripped and naked to the core,
In the chill heights of man's divinity!.....

The PYTHIA
as before

God knows, and I, who dwell with God, I know
Truth is a bitter thing to undergo;.....
And life's perfected metamorphosis
From man to God shall hardly come to pass
Save in exceeding travail and grief and pain.
Only in anguish man is born again,
Other and more and mightier than he was!.....
Only with strange and tragic ecstasies
Of body and being, mind and heart,
Life's human chrysalis
Is torn asunder, and ruined, and rent apart,

To loose man's winged divinity
Into the light of truth, the skies of liberty!.....

Yet, tho' the birth-pangs of the soul,
Which will live perfectly
With labour in its own eternity,
Are as the very agony of death,—
God knows no fraction of the human whole
Is there that wholly perisheth!
Rather in his regard, whose human eye,
After long vigil in thought's starlit sky,
Calmly enspheres the equable and vast
Clear circumspection of the eye of God,—
Who has gone on his way where none before have
trod,—
Who, in a single vision, sees at last
What was and is and what shall surely be,—
Nothing of all man seems to lose is lost
When man is slain in God's nativity!
O, rather, whoso pays the utmost cost,
All things in their degree
To him in strict accounting profit most!

The CHORUS

Strophe I

How, when, and wherefore does he profit most
Who pays the utmost cost —
Tears and blood,

Labour and sacrifice,
Anguish, bereavement, fear?
How does he gain his life whose life is lost?
For life is one and must alone suffice;
For life is brief and time is like a flood
Which no man has withstood;
And God is silent, and He is not here
To prove such ill things good.

Antistrophe I

How, why, and wherefore is it manifest
How of these worst things can derive the best?—
Joy from despair and strength from sacrifice;
Freedom and clear tranquillities and faith
From doubt and long, enslaved, laborious years;
And gain from loss and God from man and life
from death?
What can be worth to man so great a price?
Whence comes his profit when this price is paid?
When all is over and done, is sung and said,—
When life is waste and barren with blood and
tears,—
Whence shall the soul receive sufficiently?.....
What shall the soul receive for life's enforced
catastrophe?.....

Strophe II

There is no answer! God, if God there be,
Hears not our voice or hears it silently.

There is no answer save the one we give,
Who have learned something, since we learn and live,
And who are wise at least as men are wise.
Have we not seen the glory of the skies,
Felt the wide wonder of the shoreless sea,—
And made our homes on earth, where we must be
Whether we will or no?
Have we not learned in bitterness to know
It matters nothing what we deem or do,
Whether we find the false or seek the true,
The profit of our lives is vain and small?
Have we not found, whatever price is paid,
Man is forever cheated and betrayed?—
So shall the soul at last be cheated after all!

Antistrophe II

Therefore we care not what the soul may gain
Or what the soul may lose:
Theirs be the doubt, who dream! We take the plain,
Hard, certain way, and ask no great reward,—
Knowing how much 't is certain, plain, and hard
That by no wise invention or device
May we in the least measure change or choose
What our to-morrow brings.
Wisely we ask no more than will suffice
For life's least good and lowest reckonings.
And thus, tho' we are troubled with many things,
Yet to the soul's concern our hearts are cold;

Tho' cheaply, day by day, our lives are sold,
Yet are we cheerful with a little price.

HERAKLES

Coward and weak and abject!.....O my Soul!—
O God within me—grave and perfect Lord
Of life!—what passions, what rebellious tears,
What wild, weak voice of longing and despair
Have cried against thee in thy dwelling-place!
How have I wronged thy courage, strength, and pride!
What lamentable lies have lured my heart!
What chill of blind alarm has tamed my blood!
What sordid thrift, what weakness, what despair,
Have poisoned all my being with lassitude!
O human souls, my equals!—Well I know
How like a plaintive and impoverished man,
How scared and weak with old captivities,
You have beheld and heard me!—Yet, perchance,
It may be even a brave man in his time
May shed some tears for a whole high life's ruin—
And take no shame of it! A man may weep!.....
But God is in the soul! He wakes in me,
And radiant in the dawn of light, uplifts
A mighty voice of ineffable music,—wings
Of song that rise where, round the heights of heaven,
Cluster the throned beatitudes!.....Behold!
I am resolved to death, to tears and blood,
To desolation and intolerable

Bereavement,— to the worst that needs must be!
And to the best, to new nativities,
I am resolved! And I will stand apart,
Naked and perfect in my solitude,
Aloft in the clear light perpetually,—
Having afforded to the uttermost
The blood-stained, tear-drenched ransom of the soul!.....
Having by sacrifice, by sacrifice
Severed his bondage and redeemed the God—
The God I am indeed! For man is slain,
And in his death is God illustrious,
And lives!.....And I will live, and sternly make
The grandeur of my purpose manifest,
And take my profit in the treasure-house
Of truth, where none may enter save the Soul!.....

End of the Ninth Scene.

TENTH SCENE

Thebes. Before the house of HERAKLES.

Nightfall.

ALCMENA and MEGARA are seated by the threshold in the last, low light of sunset. The POET and the WOMAN stand in shadow by the house-wall. The CHORUS OF OLD MEN are seated by the steps of the Temple of Hera, at some distance.

TENTH SCENE

ALCMENA

My life burns dimly, like a famished lamp
Wasting at midnight, for my son's return.....

MEGARA

My life burns, and my love burns stedfast! — clear
And calm and candid as a guarded flame
Of assignation and of sacred vigil,
Quietly in the casement of his home.....

The WOMAN

My life burns keenly, like a glutted fire
Set at the pier-head by a wind-swept sea
To be his land-fall and his harbinger!.....

MEGARA

Like flowers unheeded in a desert place,
The long days one by one wither away;
The long nights, still and stainless, one by one
Turn, with the wan, weak daybreak in their hair,
Dismantled of its starry diadems,
And, chill and livid as a lifeless face,
Pass — as the vast light strengthens and it dawns!.....
And day and night find me and leave me here,

Where, solitary, about the open door,
I wait for his return, and keep his house,
And give his sons and mine lovingly bread
And care and welfare and serenity.
Yet, in despite of all I do, my life
Seems like a fruitful field unharvested
While he is far adventured and in peril
About such secret business of the soul.....

ALCMENA

It is the virtue and necessity
Of women, with such courage as we use,
Thus, by the threshold and the fire-light,
To serve life's large intent, and wait alone,
Strong and undaunted, for the man to come,
Who is abroad, eager with lusts and dreams
And pastimes.....Thus the sane and serious strength
Of life's true cause, in us exemplified,
Patient in us, prevails and shall prevail.

The WOMAN

It is the virtue and necessity
Of every soul to watch and wait alone,
Patient and faithful, till the Saviour comes!.....

The POET

Many shall come with gospels of salvation,
Mysterious and august; with ecstasies

And partial laws and rapt, peculiar creeds.
Many shall come, with mystic loves and faiths,
With strange conversions and perverted lusts,
With formal beauties and facilities.
Many shall come—the foolish, false and fond,
The mystic and the meek shall come — in vain!
And He, at last, — surely He, too, shall come!
And we, who know him not, — what secret signs
Shall prove him to our sense, shall specify
The Knower of the secrets of all hearts,
The single Truth Incarnate? — When He comes,
How shall we know the Saviour? — we, who learn,
With all our pains, such scant and partial things!
How shall His advent be revealed? What news,
What news for the insatiable generations
Eager of thought's transcendent enterprise—
What tidings of redemption and reprieve—
What chart, what guidance, what discovery—
What cup brimmed over from the Sacred Fount—
What apple from the gold Hesperides —
What irrecusable witness shall He bring
As earnest that His life has learned and loved
And served the soul's austere necessities,
And, for the liberal and resplendent Truth,
Made an eternal mansion in the Soul?.....

The WOMAN

Sternly and curiously of whoso comes,

Well may we ask; for He shall surely bring
The unimaginable and perfect proof!

The POET

Not He alone—we too must undergo
The stringent doubt! Well may we ask, indeed,
What tidings of salvation and the soul
Has any man after his Great Adventure?.....
Well may we ask!—for in our several hearts
Surely the selfsame question probes us all,
We, the Departed, who must soon return
To that strange nameless Nothing whence we came.....
Shall we return impoverished or, at last,
Rich with the truth's serene prosperities?
Shall we, to-morrow or to-morrow, turn
Into the sunset and the early stars
Brows branded with dishonour and defeat,
Or, with the sacred monstrance of the soul's
Excellent victory, elate and calm?
Shall we return from life dismayed and dazed,
Or quiet with an exceeding majesty,
As God is in His garden of great stars,
Where all things, each in its eternal kind,
Minister to the welfare of the soul?.....

The WOMAN

He is the Son of God; he is gone forth
To find his Father in a better place;

And he shall come with tidings of salvation
And news of great concern for every soul.
He is the Saviour: he shall fortify,
He shall bear up and nourish and sustain
All weakness, fears, and insufficiences—
All incapacities like mine, and all
Scrupulous infidelities like yours.
He shall return so free that he shall find
In you, in me himself exemplified,
And give our wingless, anxious pilgrimage
The audacious, free, far furtherance of his wings!.....

The CHORUS
from the steps of the Temple

Strophe I

Verily, Thou and I
And all men whatsoever who live and die,
We are of one humanity;
We are of one supreme infirmity,
One gross resemblance, one result, one cause;
We are as man has been before,
And no man of us all is more,
And no man of us all is free
And master of the inexorable laws; —
And all is always as it was,
And so it evermore shall be!.....
We are — who were not nor shall be again!
Yet do we vainly live and vain are we;

Vain is contentment and desire is vain
And hope is fruitless as a blasted tree;
Vain are the powers and labours of the brain;
Vain are the pangs that shake the human breast;
Vain is the body's brief felicity;
Vain was our youth! — and when the sober years
Leave us bereft and spent, — when more and more
We feel, upon life's darkening, lonely shore,
Violent and blind, the rising tide of tears, —
Vainly we seek for refuge, long for rest!.....

Antistrophe I

There is no refuge and no rest for us!
Tho' in a myriad tongues and ways
The old, wild voice of legend says,
"Thither He dwelt, and here of old He trod!"
Yet does the thought and the desire of God
Leave us impartial and incredulous.
For we have seen how all things pass
In sorrow, infirmity, and pain;
How all is dust that comes to dust;
How nothing is where nothing was;
How thick beneath the pleasant grass
Are strewn the corpses of the slain; —
And strive however much we will
We cannot find God's justice just!
How shall we call Him Father still,
Our Father, who returns us ill

For good, and when we ask for bread
Gives us a stone instead?
How shall we weep to Him? — He does not care!
How shall we sing to Him? — He does not hear!
How shall we love Him? — for He is not here!
How shall we know if God, indeed, be there?.....
Rather, by God forsaken and forgot,
Let us believe, at last, that He is dead,
Or never was and now is not!.....

Strophe II

Yea! to our sense, in life's fantastic trance,
Nothing there is apparent more than blind
Chance and mischance.....
We drift like derelicts with the aimless wind
Across the darkness of our ignorance.....
Our lives were kindled like a flame;
Nameless out of the nameless dark we came;
And like a flame that will no longer burn
Into the selfsame darkness we return!.....
Were we not then enraptured and unwise,
Should we believe
What the soul's secret whisper says,
And strive to find, with vision-haunted eyes,
Paths into Paradise,
Where we might walk with God in all His ways?
Shall we not rather patiently perceive,
And with an unambitious mind,

Man's witness to mankind
Touching these matters of the soul's concern?
Shall we not rather strive at last to learn
How, wisely and ingloriously, to live?
For we have seen, since human life began,
How inconsiderable is man,
How weak his mind's resolve, how brief his love,
How vain his strivings and his flights have been,
To find the freedom that he knows not of,
The light of Truth his eyes have never seen.....

Antistrophe II

Did not, of old, Bellerophon
Drive his winged courser up the stagnant night
To find if in God's house there was any light,
Or any welcome in God's house? — He said,
"There, in my Father's house, is home.
There, in His love's illimitable dome,
Are many mansions — and I am His son.
And on my Father's breast
There will I rest;
There will I lay down my exhausted head,
My broken heart, and there be cheered and stayed
There will I walk with God
In the calm ways that He is wont to tread,
Quiet and undismayed.....
There will I live, and live no longer here,
Blind and deceived! What else is there to do,

When all of life is questioned thro' and thro',
Save with a solemn joy to question God and hear
The splendour of His speech sing in my ear?.....
I am the Son of God! — and well I know
The Son can do no trespass if he go
Hardily where his Father's feet have trod.
I am the Son of Man! — and I shall be
Welcome within the Paradise of God.
There shall He bend the Sacred Tree
Of Knowledge, and auspiciously
Gather the ripened fruit for me,
And strike the rock of Death, and spread
The waters of eternal life, and break the bread
Of Truth's ineffable communion!" —
Thus he believed, and thus alone,
Bellerophon,
Launched on the quest, superbly rose, and rode
All the long lonely way, almost to God's abode!.....
Till, at the threshold of eternity,
He turned, and saw, and could not bear to see
The veiled and voiceless vacancy of death,
The blind abyss of human ignorance,
Fathomless and immeasurable beneath!.....
His brain reeled and his heart failed! — Suddenly
He knew his own shrill insignificance!
Then, from the very sill
Of the Unattainable Place,
The lightnings of the blind and nameless Will

Struck him down headlong thro' uncharted space;
Until at length —
By the divine, immitigable fire
Sapped in his spirit's inmost strength,
Seared and corrupted to the core
Of love and life and hope and all desire —
He lay dying by the sea's lamentable shore!.....
Thus was it then; with man 't is always thus! —
So was it once with Icarus
Who eyed the sun,
And rashly took unto his spirit wings,
And dared into the darkness, up and on,
To find the secret and the sense of things,
Where, in the eye of God, all stood revealed!.....
But, when the springs of knowledge were unsealed
And Truth towered flaming on his sight,
His pinions shattered in the light —
And like an eagle slain in flight,
He fell from where day promised and dawn was,
Down the deep darkness, smooth and blind as glass,
Irretrievably
Into the all-receiving sea!.....

Epode

Thus was it then — yea, thus it always is!
Man is an eyeless worm whose chrysalis
Never, despite his utmost strength, is riven!
In no rebirth, no metamorphosis,

Is it to man's imperfect nature given
To slough his gross humanity, and rise
Godlike, and walk with God in Paradise—
Free as God is, unconquerable and wise!
His mind is like a haunted house
Where veiled, vain figures walk in sleep;
His heart, where death's bereavements weep,
Where life's large, florid lusts carouse,
Is aimless, like a withered leaf
Vexed with love's vital wind of song;
The purpose of his soul is long;
The days of all his life are brief!
And since we know not what is death—
Since life is—since the end is near—
We care not who may come, we hear
No longer what the Spirit saith!
What tho' the Saviour come?—tho' deep
Within the soul,—as well may be—
There where the peaks of thought rise steep
And stedfast in eternity,
Truth murmurs at its fountain-head?—
We care not—for our faith is dead;
We hear not—lest our faith return;—
Lest we believe the truth—and learn;
Lest we believe the heart—and love;
Lest we believe the soul—and dare,
And strange disaster come thereof,
Of pinions shattered in mid-air,

Of ruin and desolation and despair!.....
Rather, since life is fugitive,
And truth's assurance none can give,
And no redemption makes us free,
We care not, hear not, nor believe! —
We live as man must always live;
We are as man must always be.....

The POET

It is not, up the shoreless seas of night
And thro' far twilights of the Mystery,
The rash adventure and the reckless flight
Of winged desires and dreams of liberty,
Veered to no lodestar at truth's stedfast pole,
Which can avail
The serious, strong, ambition of the soul.
The wings of man's brave ecstasies are frail;
The passions native to the human breast—
The secret raptures which persuade —
The unutterable longings which prevail—
Tried in the truth's tremendous test,
Prove weak and daunted and dismayed.
There is no swift and violent way,
There is no near and friendly goal;
There is a certain price to pay
And certain profit for the soul,
And certain justice! — when, at length,
Clad in the heart's clear, human flame,

Phrased in the mind and conscious of its aim,
Man's inmost spiritual strength —
No more wind-driven and sea-spent
On the waste waters of his ignorance —
Interprets life by his significance,
And lives, and earns his true enfranchisement!.....

HERAKLES appears, almost invisible in the closing dusk of nightfall. The POET perceives him, and his song ceases. He leans forward, staring into the darkness. Silence.

The POET
with a great, sudden gesture toward the figure of HERAKLES

Herakles! —

HERAKLES
intense and motionless

It is I!

ALCMENA

My son! —

The WOMAN

My Saviour!

MEGARA

Herakles! —

HERAKLES

It is I!

MEGARA

starting toward him

My Love —

HERAKLES

Be still!

Stand back! Stand back! I know you not! The dark
Closes you in — while round me and within me
Abounds the perfect and perpetual light!
Stand back! Be still! I am a soul withdrawn —
Shining and stark!.....My strength is like a sword,
And like a fire, and like a fearful doom!.....
I have stood solitary in the place of God —
Solitary and august!.....I know my will —

MEGARA

Herakles! Herakles!

ALCMENA

My son! —

HERAKLES

Be still!

Crowd not upon me, phantoms of the past!
I am not whom you deem! — you love me not! —
You know not me! —

To MEGARA

I am not as I was,
When last we felt in one another's breast,

Strong at the core, the pulse of life abound!
I am a stranger — you are strange to me!
The eyes, the eyes, shining with love upon me, —
The thrilled, intense face and the tender word, —
The tremulous, great joy of the stretched hands
And the surrendered heart hailing me home, —
These are no longer mine — mine to receive
Or mine to give! — No more, no more, for me,
Is any human welcome in this world!.....
There in the Temple — there, alone alone,
I died!.....And there I lived again — and thence
I come — and I shall soon depart, alone —
Alone and nameless!.....Had you means and will,
Well might the Truth be cogent to your sense! —
But I am like a pillar of pure flame
Whose vision blinds and whose embrace destroys!

MEGARA

I love you, Herakles.

HERAKLES

You loved me — loved me
When in the plaintive dusk of life I was —
When I was dark and cold as dust! — I am
Incarnate fire! I am the Householder,
Who in the House of Life slept overlong
And walked asleep in dreams.....And sleeps no more!
And dreams no more! — Yea! sleeps and dreams no more,

Ghosts of a vanished dream! Bear witness, you
Who see me; you who know me not, bear witness!—
I am the Unknown God!.....And therefore woe,
Woe unto you all who hear me speak,
Yet understand no sense of all my words,
But love me for the slight glad man I was!
Press not so all persuasively upon me,
Lest you be rent as a wind-driven cloud!
For whoso comes across my purpose or
Assails my strength, he is by no means spared!
Woe unto you all!.....Woe unto me,
Whom the Truth's justice pardons least of all—
Who am not yet at heart invulnerable —
Who am the Unknown God!—and therefore, therefore
The scourge, the victim, and the agonist,
The Saviour and the stricken sacrifice!....

The WOMAN

The Saviour!—

The POET

Sacrifice?—the sacrifice?—
What shall I understand? O Messenger,
Is Sacrifice your good report, your news
Of great concern?—and how, in sacrifice,
How is the cost cyphered and signified?

HERAKLES

Ask me no more! Be still!—

TENTH SCENE

The POET

O Herakles,
Is it the lifelong Labours? O, at last,
Is victory prepared? Are you resolved
At last to take the soul's task patiently,
And rise by sure degrees from servitude
In virtue of that work there is to do—
Gradual and long and constant as life is—
By which alone the soul exactly gains
Mastery and manumission after all?
Are you resolved and launched?—O Herakles,
Are you upon the threshold and the path?
Is it the start of all prosperities
You herald as you say farewell to us?—
Who, in the prison-house whence you go free,
Having laid down your life for the true cause,
Watch you depart into the stern, straight way
And years of endless toil, with love and faith
And exultation and heart-breaking joy!.....
O strength!—O toil!—O sacrifice!—

HERAKLES

Be still!
Silence! You know me not! You cry aloud
To craze me with the past's fantastic fears—
Frantic insanities—Eurystheus!.....Speak
No more! I tell you, in the House of God
I stood alone, and there the man I was,

Florid and perdurable and splendid, died —
Died to revive! — and paid in sacrifice
Once and for all the price of liberty!
There is no toil, no servitude, for me!
I, who by one preëminence of strength,
By one extravagance of sacrifice,
Have wrought life's final metamorphosis,
And thus become as God is, without bond
Or any taint of man's infirmities —
What need have I to labour any more?
I, who have known myself perfectible,
And dared and died, curious of consummations —
Died to the world, and in the soul revived,
Friendless and free, inviolate and divine; —
I, who have gone the uttermost way of all
Ambition, and resolved a strict farewell
To all less things than the one perfect thing; —
I, who have seen tremendously across
The ruins of my ruthless sacrifice,
Thought's stately promise of perfection bear
The ripened fruit of its accomplishment; —
What labours are there more for me to do?.....

The POET

How can the labours cease while life remains?
Life is the heart's occasion, and the soul's
Supreme emergency!.....

TENTH SCENE

HERAKLES

to himself

O patience, patience,
Desperate heart! Patience, distracted brain!
Patience!—

To the POET

O be advised, I say, to silence!
Man cannot dream at all what may betide!.....
Even as we speak together, it well may be—
Roused and released by some chance senseless word—
The universal Will shall strike athwart
Your crossed, frail threads of heart-sick human life,
And rend them all asunder!.....O, be sure
I am resolved! Surely, if needs must be,
I will make life stark naked as a flame—
Yea, void and ruined as a flame-swept place!.....
I say, well may destruction come!—and who,
Who else shall perish of it, save they whose hearts
Love has made vulnerable?.....What fumes of blood,
What savour of slain men, what reek of carnage
God may demand, I know not!.....

MEGARA

Herakles!
Herakles!

HERAKLES

You—be silent most of all!
This is a deadly peril!.....I know you not!.....

Take away your eyes and your importunate face!
You are too curious of me — Go! Go! Go!
I say no tongue can tell what may betide.....
I am dead — and I have risen from the dead,
And come again to you after some days;
And I am other than I ever was —
And you I know not, and I love you not!
What tho' you were my dearest of life's best,
My love, my wife, the mother of my sons,
My very children, innocent and mild —
Natheless I know you and I love you not!
O, hark! — hark! — hark! — how the shrill demon cries —
Naming you with an old, persistent grief,
And tremulous, long lamentations!.....

MEGARA

Hark! —
Hark! — how the voice of love cries out within you!
Hark! — how the voice of truth and justice cries —
Naming your wife, your mother, and your sons,
Who know you, love you, and forsake you not —
And will not be forsaken! Who am I? —
Who are my children? — Well you know our worth!
Can you bereave them and abandon me?
I am no casual woman of your lust;
They are no bastards born of harlotry.
I am the grave companion of your life;

I am your equal — and your sons are mine!
We are the candour and the tenderness
Of home — your home! — and we are yours, are yours —
And may not thus be outraged and disclaimed!

HERAKLES

Why will you cry out in the darkness, words
I will not hear — O ghosts! — O plaintive ghosts! —
Ghosts of the vanished dream — the dream of life?
Why will you cry out in the darkness — when
The lightnings are at hand which shall dispel,
With fire and devastation and despair,
Spectres and plaintive voices and vain things?.....
Beware! lest you may learn how stern and strange
And violent is the just clear voice of doom!
Beware! Beware! You are the living sign
Of an ignoble bondage and a will
Too lax with pleasure and emolument
To rise to the sheer heights of life's occasion!
Therefore beware! be still! — Your voice allures me.....
You would betray me.....I will hear no more!

MEGARA

Verily, in the light of life's real need,
Your words say nothing to my sense. I know
My worth and yours; I know my sons and yours
Sleep in your house, secure in you and me.
Look at me well! — for I have borne your children,

And tenderly and with an infinite joy —
In nights of vigil when the exhausted flesh
Cried out for rest, and in laborious days
Of unremitting care and cheer and love —
Reared them to life and laughter, liberty
And light, and generous grandeurs of the spirit,
And exultations of the heart, and strong
Joys of the body; and maintained your house;
And made my life's concern of them and you!
Look at me well! — Will you abandon me?
Will you bereave me of my love and joy?
Shall I be left defenceless and despised,
Haply the prey and victim of chance wars
In which I well may come to servitude,
Sweat like a harlot in some conqueror's bed,
And, in a sheer excess of misery,
Die of a vile and self-inflicted death?.....

ALCMENA swiftly enters the house of HERAKLES.

HERAKLES

I know you now! — I know you as you are!
You would betray me — you would rouse within me
Passions and vile estrangements from the soul!.....
But there is of my strength sufficiently
Now to withstand you — Yea! if needs must be —

ALCMENA reappears, bringing with her the three SONS OF HERAKLES. They go to their mother.

TENTH SCENE

HERAKLES

almost in frenzy

Take away the children! — Take away the children! —

MEGARA

Yea!

These are your sons! — Will you cast off your own?
Will you forsake, will you abandon them?
What? — shall the sons of Herakles be left
Victims to man's injustice and the scorn
Of an oppressive, vile, injurious world?
What? — shall the sons of Herakles be bowed
By shame, by slander outraged, and by greed
And violence shorn and spoiled, enslaved or slain?
They are the sons of Kings; they are your sons,
The sons of Herakles! — Shall they be left,
Helpless and weak, to lose the throne of Cadmus?
O look upon us well, as we stand here!
And know our worth and power, — and know your own
Heart's longing!.....

HERAKLES

.....vile estrangements!.....stratagems!
Beware! Beware! Would you betray me thus?
Know that I will not be seduced, enslaved,
Corrupted and made captive by your means! —
And take away the children! — take them from me! —
Is there no mercy?.....Shall it come to this?.....

MEGARA

How shall we not withstand you, O my Love,
Since you do evil in your heart and lie?
Witness!—we have no selfish will with you,
But the pure purpose of life's sacred cause,
Here in my sons incarnate — and in me.
There is no stronger purpose, and no cause
More pure and perfect. Yea! we must prevail,
Since, with the strength, in us exemplified,
Of all life's cosmic and immutable will,
Now we traverse your madness and your wrong!

HERAKLES

The Lightning falls!.....Hear you the thunders peal?.....
See you the keen, swift flame striking to slay?.....
Nothing avails!.....Nothing avails!.....All's said—
All's over and said!.....and one thing is to do,
One violent and intolerable deed
Of Sacrifice!—till the white altar glows
Crimson and shining in the white, clear light;—
Till the salt savour and the fumes of blood
Rise in the boundless air's tranquillity;—
Till the relentless sleepless Spirit knows
There is no human shadow and no bond
To dim its Truth, to thwart its Liberty!

HERAKLES grasps his great bow and takes an arrow from his quiver.

TENTH SCENE

MEGARA

Why do you fix me with such bestial eyes
Of madness and revenge?

With a great cry

.....The children!

HERAKLES

Death!

He fits an arrow to the bow.

MEGARA

He will destroy the children!

The POET

He is mad!

He is stark mad!

He seizes HERAKLES, but is thrown to the ground, where he lies, stunned.

MEGARA

.....The children!

HERAKLES

Death!

ALCMENA

My boy!—

Herakles!

MEGARA

Herakles! — the children! —

HERAKLES

Death!

ALCMENA

These are your sons, your wife —

MEGARA

— your little children!

Mercy!.....

ALCMENA

Have mercy! — Herakles! — My son! —

O —

MEGARA

Spare the children! — Spare the children! —

HERAKLES

Death!

He draws his bow and kills the children one by one as they are crying for mercy.

First CHILD

Father! — No!.....No!.....

Dies.

Second CHILD

Save me! — Mother! —

Dies.

TENTH SCENE

Third CHILD

Father! —

Father! —

MEGARA

throwing herself upon the bodies of her sons

My children!.....O my doves!..... My children!.....

HERAKLES

Rather rejoice! rejoice! Is not the deed
Accomplished? Blood, the blood of Sacrifice —
The dear heart's blood!.....Behold, these were my children! —
These were my little children! — yet I slew
And spared not! God is not more pitiless,
More perfect and inexorable!.....Rejoice!
These were my children! — and she too shall die
As they have died! None shall betray me, none
Resist me, none persuade me.....

ALCMENA

Herakles!

MEGARA

O my children!.....O my children!.....O my children!.....

HERAKLES

grasping his sword and rushing upon her

Silence! Silence! Silence! — Death! Death! Death! —

O let there be rejoicing, for God's sake!
Set the strong hand unto the sword, and slay!.....
And slay!.....And slay!.....

Suddenly he sways and falls insensible to the ground.

ALCMENA

..My boy!.....My boy!.....

MEGARA

.....My children!

End of the Tenth Scene.

ELEVENTH SCENE

Thebes. Before the house of HERAKLES.

Some weeks have elapsed since the close of the preceding scene.

MEGARA and ALCMENA sit together near the door of the house. The WOMAN sits upon the steps of the Temple of Hera, at some distance.

ELEVENTH SCENE

ALCMENA

I, who am almost lifeless as the dead, —
Who live — if this long vigil of despair
Is life — as he lives who was born my son,
Anguished and spent with ecstasy and pain, —
Have kept this blasted fragment of my life
Day after day by the disused, dumb door,
That if he lives and is not dead and dares
Return and comes out of his solitude,
Damned and defeated, shattered and diseased —
Who was above all men superb and strong! —
He shall not lack the refuge of one heart
At least: — and still for him my heart is sanctuary!
Where else, indeed, should he find room to weep,
Save on this withered breast that gave him suck?
What heart should be to him compassionate,
Faithful and fond in sickness as in health,
If mine were not — of whose essential blood
He was compounded and made quick and whole?
He is my son! —

The WOMAN

He is my Saviour!

ALCMENA

When,
When shall he come? No longer, as at first,
We hear him, like an inarticulate thing,
Dreadfully in the darkness crying aloud.....
He is alone and silent.....He is silent.....
He is alone.....How is it with him now,
There in the desolation of his house?
Is he become a speechless idiot
Who, gibbering, glares about the vacant rooms,
Inhuman, scared, distraught, day after day?.....
Rather, it well may be, the worst and last
Ecstasy of the soul's despair is silent!.....
Yet there are times in my exhausted brain,
When, with a sense almost of rest and peace,
I do believe my boy is dead.....

The WOMAN

He lives.
He shall return.

MEGARA

My sons shall not return!.....

ALCMENA

The maniac and the dead return no more!—
Theirs is the better part!

MEGARA

My boys are dead.....

ELEVENTH SCENE

ALCMENA

Only the dead are fortunate!

MEGARA

My doves —
My little children, tender and very young —
My children — O my children! — Where are they?
All desolately dead! — all violently
And vilely dead, abominably murdered,
Pitiably and strangely slain! — my brave, my strong,
Beautiful children!..... O my sons!.....

The WOMAN

He lives.

ALCMENA

Happily not!.....I will believe he lives
No more.....

MEGARA

He cried out like a blood-sick beast,
And slew them, one by one! — their father slew them!
And they are gone, my white and innocent doves! —
Gone!.....gone!.....I saw the dreadful majesty
Of Death smooth their still faces, and their lips
Were dumb, and in their eyes there was no light.....
He slew them — one by one!

ALCMENA

.....and we are left
Alive!

MEGARA

.....and life shall never cease to be
A blasted thing, a bitter broken ruin,
An utter and unendurable bereavement!.....
There is no end to the abominable
Agony!.....They are dead — my sons! — and he,
My Herakles, my love, — he is not dead!
He lives and lurks within the empty house,
A mouthing idiot, crouching like a beast,
Sullen and fierce and frenzied in his lair!.....

ALCMENA

Nay, I believe, indeed, my boy is dead,
As they are dead, who were well-nigh my children —
Happily dead out of this desperate world!
Let us believe at least he lives no more;
Rather, with joy, let us believe him dead!
For then with joy we too might soon depart
Where there is no more madness and no pain;
Where, in the Silence, God's dominion ends;
Where there is sleep which neither wakes nor dreams.....
Only the dead are fortunate! — I know
Life is an ill no mortal strength can bear!
What man could be more mighty than he was?
What heart more great? what soul more excellent? —
Yet is he failed and fallen and overcome,
Body and heart and soul!.....O fortunate,

Fortunate are they who have died so young!
At least they shall not fall, like Herakles,
Out of a perfect and a prosperous manhood
Into foul pits of madness and despair;
Nor live to sit, bereft and blind with tears,
On the charred ruins of a wasted life,
As I do — who am mother to them all!

The WOMAN

Herakles! Herakles! — He shall return!
He lives!

ALCMENA

Be still!

MEGARA

My sons are dead!.....

ALCMENA

My boy
Is dead! — And I remember, I remember
How he was radiant and tender, proud,
Passionate, dauntless; how his eyes were grave
And clear.....And I remember little things
Of him.....And I believe a woman dies
When she remembers, as I do, such things,
Such simple, poignant, childish memories,
Of a dead child!.....

MEGARA

.....She dies, I know she dies!

THE POET appears.

The POET

O theatre of perpetual desolation —
Scene of the soul's last tragedy — where death
And ruin and dread, inexpiable deeds
Conspired with madness to the soul's defeat! —
O dumb deserted house of lamentation,
Sepulchre of the soul! — and you, and you,
Mourners before the sepulchre, poor hearts! —
What can console you or redeem you now?
Nothing avails, I know, nothing avails!
For all is lost: there is no prosperous
Expectancy, no refuge any more!.....
Therefore I will not vex you with vain words;
I will but weep with you, and then — farewell!
Farewell, O broken-hearted women, rent
And splintered wreckage from the seas of life,
Stranded upon the sterile sands of sorrow
Beside the bitter, barren fields of death!
Here have I nothing more to do but weep —
Therefore I will not stay. Yet, O be sure
I understand you with a passionate grief!
For I — I too have suffered of these things
And shared with you some portion of your pain!.....
Yet will I say farewell, for now the long,
Supreme desire, within me, and the faith
That will not rest, revive: my soul once more

Animates to its own emergency.
Life and its endless future enterprise
Call me. I feel the longing in my heart
Of new departures and the liberty
Of open skies, great winds and solitude —
Of starlight on the mountains and calm seas
At sunset and wide mornings of the world!.....
Farewell, O dispossessed and desolate hearts! —

He turns his face toward the house of HERAKLES.

And you, who filled the measure of my hopes
Of man, and roused raptures of emulation —
Farewell!

He turns to the WOMAN.

But you — rise up! Not all is lost!
O let the dead bury their dead!.....Your place
And mine are with the living! Come away
Out of this charnel-house! Perpetually
Of all slain things fresh flowers and fruits are made,
When the new mind of man in the new world
Of thought's discovery tills virgin fields,
And the new future like a harvest blooms.....
Now is the ripe occasion. Leave the tears
Unshed, the dead unburied — come away!
We have so very little time to live,
To solve the secret and discern the light —
Such insufficient, fretful hours of dawn
And day and dusk in which to hurry on,

Home-sick and sick at heart, like strayed, sad children;—
And Home is far, and the great Nightfall comes!.....
Rise! Rise! The shattered lamp gives light to none!
All is postponed when death and madness come;
And we who live, we have no time to wait!
We face the Future!.....He is, with his peers,
Drawn down the sunless vortex of the Past.....
Bellerophon is fallen; Icarus
Is fallen; Phaethon is fallen; — he
Is fallen! Yea, immedicably his heart
Is cancered and his soul withered and spent!
And there is nothing in an idiot's brain
Save the unendurable nothingness of death!.....

The WOMAN
rising to her feet

He shall return! He lives! He is not mad!
He shall return —

The POET

— shattered or mad or dead!

The WOMAN

I say, he lives! I say, his mind is whole!
I tell you he shall come again in power,
Stronger and more serene, more sane, more wise,
Self-mastered, certain of his path and goal,
Radiant and unashamed, inspired, resolved!.....
He shall return —

The POET

You speak fantastic things.
There is no hope, no secret that absolves;
No mystic resurrection; no rebirth;—
That were too terrible!.....

MEGARA

Too terrible!.....
Here in his madness he destroyed my sons —
His children! Here he fell — he shall not rise!
Forever and forever his soul is damned;
His life is wasted as spilt wine; his heart
Rent like a blasted tree!..... My desolation
Is faultless!

ALCMENA

He shall never rise from this
Abyss, this degradation, this despair.....
O, let us all believe that he is dead!
I dare not think he lives! — for then, indeed,
Then, if the door were opened, we should see
Not him we know, my strong and splendid son —
Rather God knows what spent, deformed, dread thing,
What nameless monster —

MEGARA

— what poor beast of prey,
Blackened with blood!

The POET

What crazed, cringed human ruin! —

Suddenly the door of the house of HERAKLES opens. HERAKLES stands upon the threshold, calm, grave, erect, and strong. A moment of breathless silence. Then,

The WOMAN
with a great cry

Herakles! Herakles! My Saviour! — See,
My lamp still burns!.....And now the Bridegroom comes —
At last!

ALCMENA
rising up, blind with tears

My boy! — My son! — My Herakles! —

The POET

Herakles? — Herakles? — What miracle? —
What alchemy? — He comes, serene and strong,
Mailed in the grave, fine gold of victory!
Who can believe —

MEGARA
wildly

The lie is palpable!
Grim and fantastic phantom of the past —
Herakles? — No, it must not be! Reply! —
What cheat is this? — O what abominable,
Cruel, and senseless trickery is this?
His ghost returns — but where is Herakles?
Where is the madman and the murderer?

ELEVENTH SCENE

HERAKLES

I am the madman; and the murderer
I am; and I am Herakles; and I,
I am the Resurrection and the Life,
I am the Soul, whose inmost virtue is
Thus to outlive destruction and return,
Valid with Truth's perennial victory! —
Thus to survive, despite of life and death,
With awful strength, the throes of man's despair,
The unremitting madness and defeat
And grim disaster of his mortal days! —
Thus, with the flame of truth's unfailing lamp,
To light aloft its calm, inflexible way,
There where his human vision, blind with tears,
Sees only, in the nether gulf of grief,
Vacancy and the windy darkness! — thus
To pass with man thro' all the flames of Hell,
Till the crude ore of his humanity,
Purged of its dross, refined and purified,
Yields, unalloyed, its bright immortal gold! —
And thus, in power and splendour and dominion,
To rise from man's wild weakness calm and strong;
To sing in man's disconsolate heart; to find
Faith in man's abject infidelities;
To make of man's infirmities the means
Of victory; to be imperishable;
To realize God in self and strength; to save
And serve and strive — till man is overcome! —

Till the immortal energy of Life,
Transfigured with its own divine intent,
Evolves still further to its perfect end!.....
I am the soul — the inmost, immanent,
Real and essential core of life —

MEGARA

And I? —
I, who have all my life long lived in love
And mild beneficent deeds and ways of being —
I, who am innocent, God knows! — shall I
Be as I am, forever a blasted thing,
Derelict, wrecked and spent in heart and soul,
While you, befouled with blood and infamy,
Rise like a God triumphant out of Hell? —
Shall I be damned and you be saved? — No! No!
Surely there shall be justice after all —
Justice at least! — since there is neither love
Nor mercy nor compassion in God's heart.....
There shall be justice! — justice! —

HERAKLES

In the dark,
I have endured your anguish; and my heart
Is broken; and it breaks again for you!
Verily, verily, in my solitude,
Mine was a mightier agony than yours! —
Were they not mine, the failure and the deed?
Therefore I know how mad the truth must seem

Now to your sense, as then it seemed to mine —
How mad, how dark — and O, how terrible!.....

MEGARA

Justice!.....There shall be justice!.....

HERAKLES

Truth is just.
And truth prevails, relentless and revealed
Between us: — I, the living; you, the lost.....
Only the soul survives — only the soul
Whose self and substance are the living truth!
Therefore am I redeemed.

MEGARA

O Herakles!.....

HERAKLES

Megara! — O my dear, I know, I know!.....
Love was your virtue and your life; and I,
Even I have choked the fountains of your being
And left your love bereft, and one by one
Shattered your heart-strings — till at last there is
No breath of music in you any more!.....

MEGARA

No love, no light, no breath of life, no being! —
I am a cracked flask whence the wine of life
Is drained away to the least, utmost drop

Into the new-turned furrow of their graves!.....
You know not how it is at all with me:
I tell you I am dead as a quenched fire;
Dead as the dreadful eyes of a slain man;
Dead as the blue blank face of a drowned child;—
Dead as my sons are dead!—Yea, more than they!.....
Dead — dead — dead to the core!.....

HERAKLES

So am I dead —
I, who was once the man you loved and knew!
It is not I — it is the Soul, the Truth —
It is the God who dwells and reigns within me —
God, whom I am when all His work is done! —
Who is so sternly indestructible,
Who is not ruined and shattered and undone,
Poisoned at life's perpetual fountain-head,
Damned and abased and irretrievably
Crushed and corrupted even to the core of being
By this incredible, bestial infamy,
My madness fostered and my hands fulfilled!.....
It is not I, it is not Herakles —
It is the Truth, which has no heart to break —
Truth, which inures by labour after all! —
It is the Soul, whose inmost life and strength
Are of so pure and terrible a temper
That even against the iron door of Death

They are not dulled, and when the stone-blind eyes
Of Destiny shed lightnings that consume
The very being and heart and mind of man,
They are not seared or shaken or appalled!
It is the thirst and hunger of the Spirit
Which, with a longing so relentless, crave
The bread and wine of truth's communion,
That, tho' the wine be mixed with blood and tears,
The bread with madness poisoned, and despair,
They will not be denied to feed the soul —
Which finds its nourishment and lives and thrives
And grows out of great error by such means!
O verily, verily the human thing
I was — the man who once was Herakles —
After this wild, irreparable wrong,
This cruel, senseless, irremediable
Accident of my own infirmities —
Is dead, is damned, is shattered, is destroyed!.....
Know me at last, Megara, Megara!
Behold me naked and ruined as I am! —
All that makes human life desirable;
All that sustains and comforts and consoles;
All that the years can give from birth to death
Of perishable, profound, pure happiness,
And honour, and the clear, sweet, tranquil sense
Of innocence, and sane, beneficent deeds; —
All, all is lost!..... Yet when I rose at last,
In anguish, from the horror and abysm

Of lunacy, scanted, despoiled, bereft —
A shattered, beggared, blasted man! — and cried
With a terrible voice for the inevitable
Mercy of death — it came not!..... and I knew
My strength!..... and clear and grave within, I heard,
Thro' the tremendous silence where the dead
Cumbered the stricken field of my defeat,
The soul's voice sound victoriously!..... I saw
The inscrutable skies of thought stand wide asunder,
Splendid with stars!..... And then I knew, I knew
That all was lost! — for man shall lose his life
To gain his life — and more than all was found! —
Found was the sense and source and strength of life;
Found was the way, the light, the truth — the soul!

The POET

Who can believe —

HERAKLES

Bear witness to the Truth!
This is the secret I survive to tell:
To him who hath abundance shall be given;
From him who hath not shall be taken away
Even that which he hath!

MEGARA

— My love!..... My children!.....

HERAKLES

Only the soul survives — and I survive,

Hardly and terribly enough! But now,
Now with a nameless sense of faith and fear,
Of grandeur and dismay and stern resolve,
I know I am invulnerable — I know
Life shall endure, life shall evolve in me! —
In me essential metamorphoses,
Phases and transformations of the soul!
In me new strengths and new validities!
In me conceptions, pangs, and pregnancies,
Labours and parturitions, throes of change,
Forms and conversions of the element!
In me new germs and new survivals, new
Mutations, new futurities! In me
Perfections, consummations, alchemies!
In me new life! — In me exemplified,
New life, more real, self-conscious and divine —
Perfect, immediate and complete at last!
I am the Life of life; I am the Soul;
I am the strength, the flux, the growth, the trend;
I am the future and the hope of man!.....

MEGARA

You?.....And my hope, my future, — where are they?.....

The POET

I will believe when all is justified —
Only when all is served and saved and done.
Many shall see, some shall proclaim the truth:

Who shall perform the truth? Who shall descend,
Wearing undimmed the starlight on his brows,
And, with the soul's serene, essential strength,
Toil in dark valleys of this human world?
Who shall perform the Labours, and in all
The days and ways and destinies of life,
Bring his perfection perfectly to pass? —
What of the Labours, Herakles?

CREON and AMPHITRYON appear, followed by soldiers and populace.

ALCMENA

— The King!

CREON

Herakles —

MEGARA

Justice! — Justice! —

AMPHITRYON

Herakles.....

The POET

Only the truth is just.

The WOMAN

He is the Truth.

CREON

Wisdom is justified —

ELEVENTH SCENE

AMPHITRYON

My son!.....

HERAKLES

The truth —

Only the truth is justified!

CREON

The truth? —

What is the truth?

HERAKLES

I am the living Truth.

CREON

turning to the people

There is no strength nor power but in God,
Children of Cadmus! — Witness and believe!
Him you behold is Herakles, the man
More than a man in fortune and renown,
Virtue and strength, resolve and valiant deeds.
You will recall how yesterday he seemed
Throned in a splendid, sole preëminence,
Pattern of men and favourite of Gods
And flower of manhood — envied of the world!
So was he once superb!.....Behold him now!
There can be now in all the world no man
So mean, so warred upon by Destiny,
So desperate as to envy Herakles!

Children of Cadmus, for that vengeance is
Of God and wisdom is denied to man —
For that the strength of Herakles was more
Than human, and his virtue and resolve
More than the virtue and resolve of men —
For that his soul grew emulous of God
And strove with God — therefore the hand of God
Fired his brain with madness, and he fell! —
Fell as a star falls, swiftly, and is spent;
Fell beyond all resource or hope.....And now,
Children of Cadmus, now behold him well,
Infamous, abject, desperate, and say
One to another, "This is Herakles!".....

HERAKLES

Say what you will, you shall not change the truth.

CREON

Children of Cadmus, witness and believe! —
Witness the will of God exemplified;
Witness the soul's expectancy reproved;
Witness, believe, and learn — as all we must! —
Still to walk humbly in the fear of God.
So will I do — and strive as best I may
To follow in God's ways where they may go.
Therefore am I resolved — seeing, in wrath,
The hand of God heavy upon this man —
To cast him forth, unpurified, alone,

In the damnation of his monstrous guilt,
To wander in perpetual banishment!.....

A brief silence.

HERAKLES

Children of Cadmus! I have loved the truth —
I have beheld the truth — I am the Truth!
Once to the world and you I bade farewell:
I was a lover then, and the Beloved,
Shining afar, leaned to my soul's embrace! —
I was a Seer then, and in mine eyes
The visionary light kindled and cleared! —
I loved — I saw — I bade farewell — and yet
I could not go! — I merely loved and saw!
Love may persuade and light may guide the soul:
It is the work we do which shall avail! —
Only the work — the labours of the spirit
Wrought in the living substance of the truth!
Therefore I could not go when once before,
Dazed and deceived, I bade you all farewell.
But now, deliberate and determined, now,
Sane and serene, I well may take my leave;
For now at last I am indeed, indeed,
Gone from you all a long and bitter way —
Stumbled and groped and climbed, with bloody feet
And dreadful clutching hands, above you all!.....
It was the rough, dark pathway of my strength
Which was not skilled to any other road,

Yet did not fail me when my spirit knew
Its utmost need, and which survives entire,
Inflexible and irresistible,
Nourished and nerved to new necessities!
I am become the vehicle of life's
Infinite aspiration — now at last
Shaped to its perfect, true, divine intent.....

CREON

Silence! Your brain is still diseased and dark.
Therefore depart, alone and unabsolved!

HERAKLES

I ask not absolution — there is none!
There are no lustral waters in this world
Can cleanse me of their blood or take away
The stigma of their murder! As I am,
So I depart into the future, so
I make life's issue of the soul! Behold!
I am the Hero and Protagonist
Of life, the Pioneer of life's true cause!
I am the Sacrifice! My purse must pay
The long, incalculable arrears of man's
Folly and ignorance and wrath and wrong —
The price of truth, the ransom of the soul!
For, as with you and all men, so with me:
The life my father and my mother gave me
Was all compounded of the sins and woes,

Passions and appetites, credulities,
Cruelties, lies, hypocrisies of man!
So were my home, my happiness, my hope,
Builded of frailty and the stuff of dreams.....
Therefore they fell! But in the abject dust,
See! how the soul's pure gold of truth shines out,
More radiant, more resplendent, more revealed
In the broad, roofless day of devastation
Than ever it was in the kind, tranquil light
Of life's content and blind security!
And see! O see! — into the light, the light —
There where before stood the safe walls of home —
What liberal, lonely spaces stretch afar,
Endless and unrestricted, to persuade
The homeless soul to new discoveries —
New labours!.....

The POET

Labours? —

HERAKLES

I assume the task!
Mine are the labours, for the wage is mine!

The POET

The Labours — of Eurystheus?

HERAKLES

They are mine! —
Mine are the weakness, ignorance, and lust;

Mine is the mean, harsh longing of dominion;
Mine are the crime and cowardice of man;
Mine is the soul of man — the self of God!
And there shall be no vile or violent thing
Left uninformed of my divinity!.....
Therefore the Labours! — for the soul must strive,
The God must serve, until His virtue is,
In man's degraded being and abject heart,
In man's deformed, incurious, haunted mind,
In man's gross greed and dull brutalities,
Illustrious and exemplified! — till truth,
Loved and proclaimed, at last is lived and known!
Farewell!

HERAKLES departs. The people, with gestures of horror, draw aside, as tho' in fear of contamination, to let him pass.

The POET

At last!.....At last!.....

ALCMENA

My boy!.....

AMPHITRYON

My son!.....

MEGARA

with a great cry

My Herakles!.....

ELEVENTH SCENE

The WOMAN
to the POET

Haste! Haste! The best begins!
He is before us — let us go!

The POET

You love
The truth — I see the truth. — He is the Truth!
Tho' it avail us nothing, let us go!

The POET and the WOMAN turn and depart.

End of the Eleventh Scene.

TWELFTH SCENE

The Caucasus. A lofty mountain-peak rising in pinnacles of naked rock.

On a narrow ledge, PROMETHEUS stands erect, chained to the face of the cliff. Before his feet the mountain falls sheerly away to green pastures far below, which slope steeply to a narrow beach of bright sand. The horizon of the sea closes the vast prospect. On either hand the trend of the coast, bordered by mountains, meadow and forest, field and stream, stretches in a vast curve indefinitely outward into the distance. Landward, as far as the eye can reach, rise high mountains clothed with forests and interspersed with fertile valleys.

It is a calm, clear evening, about half an hour before sunset. The sun hangs flaming over a windless sea and in a cloudless heaven. The moon just shows over the eastward hills. In the western sky there is one star.

The vast figure of the TITAN stands motionless and superb in the full splendour of the setting sun.

In the time elapsed between this and the preceding scene, HERAKLES has accomplished all his great Labours except the voyage to the Hesperides.

TWELFTH SCENE

PROMETHEUS

The night returns — and still Prometheus
Wears on his limbs the chains He forged in Hell.
The night returns — and soon the Bird of God
Returneth ravening to his massacre.
The night returns — and God is in His Heaven,
Throned in the world's dominion..... Once again,
As when I fared up the prodigious night
And seized the Torch out of His Holy House,
Round His resplendent Being in Paradise,
I seem to feel the everlasting Light
Blend with the voice of the invisible choirs
Thro' mansions of perennial festival.....
The night returns — and God is in His Heaven,
And fear and anger vex the heart of God,
Brooding on me and my indomitable
Rebellion and the soul's validity;
While far below men kindle in their hearths
And hearts the Fire I gave, giving them life!
These were my works! I have achieved, God knows,
Somewhat of everlasting worth and real
Significance! — God knows and life records
My hazardous and unalterable deeds!

Mine was the cosmic issue — and in me
The purpose of the inexorable will
Of life, the process of the endless flux,
The motion of the universal being,
Found its assured, victorious utterance!
I was, in the beginning of the world,
Where there was only desolation, death,
Dismay and darkness, — where the lives of men
Were vile and violent like the lives of beasts; —
And I alone found out the Great Idea,
Found the supreme and secret meaning out;
And I alone found out the forthright way
Of man's deliverance, and restored the light,
And made of life a lovely and human thing,
And gave the soul divine and pregnant dreams!.....
Man was reborn in me! — and therefore God,
Jealous and fearful, came in wrath against me,
Binding me captive, whom He could not slay,
Here on this cliff, where His malignant hate,
Burning thro' æons of unrecorded time,
Visits me with intolerable wrongs.
Yet, tho' I wear His chains, and even now
The Eagle wheels aloft, scenting his carnage,
Still is my heart's inviolate hope serene
And undismayed; still life reveals its trust;
Still and forever I keep the Faith, and still
Bear and believe the testament of Truth.
The victory was mine and mine shall be

TWELFTH SCENE

The victory! — the first and last and best
Are mine! I saved mankind and now, in turn,
Man shall conceive, in his maturity,
My Saviour and my Comrade and my Lord!
Therefore I stand, invincible, and wait,
Solitary and august and unafraid,
As he must be whose witness to mankind
Is of the free divinity of man.
Therefore I wait — for He shall surely come!
And when He comes, with gospel on His lips
And revelation in His eyes and power
And liberty shining in either hand,
He shall not find me crushed and overborne! —
Rather, safe-guarded by the constancy
Of an unwearied spirit and dauntless heart,
Shall He, at last, as from a father's hands,
Receive the Soul's unconquered citadel!

HERAKLES appears somewhat higher up in the mountain. He advances to the sheer edge of the precipice and pauses, gazing out over the world. From where he stands PROMETHEUS is invisible.

HERAKLES

Hither away are the Hesperides —
Hither away is hope — hither away
The heart of life yearns unto Paradise!.....
Hither away the insatiable will

Of life, grown conscious of its aim, intends
New liberations, new supremacies,
New powers and new ineffable dominions
And new aggrandizements of being and life's
New utterance of the soul's new testament!
Hither away is the new enterprise
Of thought; the endless wind, hither away,
Strains out the sails of the mind's caravel; —
The stars, the sunrise and the land-fall are
Out in the dark.....beyond.....hither away!.....
Hither away love is a lovelier thing
And of more majesty and mightier:
Nerved to the temper of supreme ambitions,
Filled with achievement, flushed, immediate, fain —
Yea, all of profit and service to the soul!
Hither away is Truth more excellent,
Freedom more absolute, conception more
Creative, life more ample and lordlier,
Knowledge more vastly and serenely sphered
In new dilate horizons of calm light,
Faith more secure and Justice more divine!
Hither away is the New Future! — where
The harvest of the sowing of spent lives
Shall feed new generations, and suffice
To sow new fields and ripen and provide
The Living Bread of new prosperities.....
Hither has labour brought me; and away, —
Wise from the past with new proficiencies,

Single and resolute and well-matured
To new activities, new avatars
And new validities, — the strength of life,
Spent all in conscious service to the soul,
Shall bring me on..... and on.....hither away
Into the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory,
Into the whole inheritance of man!.....
O not in vain have I been up and down
In the whole earth, and seen the imperial East
Whose florid cities shine under the sun
With banners and dyed raiment and red gold,
And in the wide, wild West wandered to where,
Round the scarped, savage, wind-swept verge of the
world,
The heavy headlands stand into the sea!.....
O not in vain, from the Iberian hills
To Themiscyra, from the Libyan waste
To the Thessalian plain, my feet have trod
The sea, the mountain and the wilderness;
My strength and skill have brought the outlawed beasts
Into subjection, and, with civil arts
And fine express proficiencies and grave
Liberal manners, cultured and endowed
With spirit and substance and significance
The shy, fierce lives of vagrant, bestial men!
O not in vain I served and sacrificed,
Loved and was lonely, and, in mighty works,
Extolled the Spirit, and practised and professed

Tender and excellent humanities
And the victorious virtues of the soul!
And not in vain, out of the night of Hell,
I drew the Hound of Hell, the ravening Death,
Into the light of life, and held him forth
Where the soul's sun shed lightnings in his eyes
And he was like a thing of little meaning,
Powerless and vain and no-wise terrible —
While with my inmost heart I laughed aloud
Into the blind and vacant face of Death,
And cast him from me, so he fled away
Screaming into the darkness whence he came!.....
Nothing is vain of all that I have done!
I have prevailed by labours and subdued
All that man is below his utmost truth,
His inmost virtue, his essential strength,
His soul's transcendent, one preëminence!
Yea, I have brought into the soul's dominion
All that I am! — and in the Master's House
There is no strength of all my mortal being
That does not serve Him now; there is no aim,
There is no secret which He does not know;
There is no will save one, which is the Lord's!.....

PROMETHEUS
calling with a mighty voice

O unutterable ecstasy of hope!.....
O Son of Man!.....

TWELFTH SCENE

HERAKLES

Who calls me? Who is here,
Sharing my solitude?

PROMETHEUS

O Son of Man! —
O Herakles! — I am Prometheus!

HERAKLES

swiftly descending the cliff to where PROMETHEUS stands chained

Prometheus! — Prometheus! — Torch-Bearer! —
Titan! — My brother! — O my brother! —

PROMETHEUS

Hail!
Herakles! Herakles! O Son of Man! —
O Liberator! — O holy day of triumph! —
My brother and my son — all is fulfilled!
Yea, I have kept the faith, and all is well,
All is surpassing well!.....

HERAKLES

Prometheus! —
Friend and Redeemer of the life and soul
Of man! — O Torch-Bearer! — receive from me
The love and the thanksgiving of mankind,
Who keep and celebrate in sacred trust

Your memory, living with the life you gave!
Receive out of my heart the love, receive
The emulation of humanity,
Which is the harvest of your seed! — for I,
I am of you and yours, Prometheus!
Yours is the light of life, the light of being,
In which I was conceived into this world —
Father!

PROMETHEUS

Behold, my light is everywhere!.....
Light — where the sun gorgeously dies away,
Aureoled with its own magnificence;
Light — where the quiet, interminable sea
Shines like a blind and burnished shield of gold;
Light — where the sky utters a single star;
Light — where the ethereal vesture, pale as mist,
Spun of the scant, strange silver of the moon,
Hangs on the shoulders of the heaven-ward hills.....
See! the whole sphered, smooth skies are like a bowl
Carved of a single azurite and brimmed
With golden wine, with light! — to slake the thirst
Of man's insatiable spirit, and rouse,
Far in the depths of his creative mind,
Light, the eternal light, which there displays
Commensurate splendours and sublimities
To these of God's initial ordinance!
O Light — eternal Light! O miracle

And benediction — tranquil, tender majesty —
Spacious and grave serenity of light!
O meaning, revelation, breath of life —
Interpretation and significance,
Prospect and clear persuasion of the truth —
Impalpable essence of the universal being —
Light! — of the sun, the moon, the stars — the soul!
Here have I stood, — how long, day after day! —
Sole in my strength as in a watch-tower,
And seen, abroad over the living world,
The punctual sunrise and the stars return,
The light return, to me illustrious!
Thus have I been assured, and thus received
My life's recognizance — seeing the light
Witness my worth and vindicate my deed;
Seeing the light perennial, and the life —
To me and mine perennial victory!.....
And now, O Son! — O Son of Man! — O strength
Born of my strength! — I know not all in vain
I nursed mankind with mystic hopes and dreams,
And gave, out of God's violated dwelling,
Eternal treasures to ephemeral man!
I know not all in vain I have endured
These violent years and harsh extremities:
For you, conceived of my humanity,
You are my celebration and my crown,
You are my perfect proof!

HERAKLES

Prometheus! —
With all my friendless, childless, desolate,
And lonely heart I love you! Let us be,
Henceforward and together without end,
As brother and brother, blent in perfect love.....
O to surrender utterly — to give,
Utterly and at last and all in all,
The passionate proud liberality
Of the unspared, exultant, eloquent,
Abandoned, loosed and loving heart of man!.....
O to commune as equals! O to share
The soul that finds no less than life itself,
And all of life and love and death and birth
And being its special issue! — O my brother,
Give me your love and blend your light with mine!
What may we not achieve, who have so wrought
Apart and lonely — being at last as one:
One heart, one soul, one life, one enterprise!
Come! let us hence.....

PROMETHEUS

.....O to the end of the world —
O to the end of time and truth, together
Let us go hence!.....I love you, Herakles!

He starts toward HERAKLES. The fetters restrain him.

TWELFTH SCENE

HERAKLES

Shatter the bonds! Rise from the fetters! Rise!
Come! — let us go in strength, and quietly
Blent in one meditation and one vision,
Elate, into the future, hand in hand.....
Come! — for the light of life clears and abounds;
Come! — the supreme occasion is prepared;
Come! — the victorious voice of love proclaims
The epic grandeur of the soul's ambition!
Suffer His chains no more, Prometheus!
The hour is now — rise and depart with me!
Will you be lax now the great door stands wide
Asunder, and salvation is at hand?
Where is your faith? — Alas, Prometheus,
Where is your strength?.....

PROMETHEUS

struggling vainly against the fetters

My strength has well sufficed
Here to withstand God's grim omnipotence,
Day after day, despite what agonies!.....

HERAKLES

Shatter the chains!

PROMETHEUS

still struggling in vain

He will not let me go.....

Yet, tho' His strength prevails against me thus,
He is not now victorious — I am still
Stedfast and undefeated! It is well
With me! — for all the utmost power of God
Can rob me of my honour by no means,
Nor vex the heart's exultant happiness!

HERAKLES

Honour and happiness? — O hungry heart,
Dreaming of love! O rash, insensate hope
Of friendship and of free communion!
O stern, relentless solitude! — Alas!
Alas, Prometheus, yours are empty words!
What is the honour of a captive soul?
What is the happiness a heart can feel,
Whose love refrains, whose faith falters and fails?

PROMETHEUS

You speak at ease, knowing no fate like mine:
It is a happy and honourable thing
Thus to preserve so long inviolate
The life where human hope finds sanctuary,
And keep aloft the blood-stained banner of man's
Rebellion, like a challenge and defiance,
Flowing in the free wind of life forever!.....
It is a happy and honourable thing
Thus to withstand the very power of God,
And bear so long unspeakable agonies!.....

TWELFTH SCENE

HERAKLES

.....Thus to withstand a phantom, and endure
The anguish of a self-inflicted pain? —
Honour and happiness are cheaply bought,
Yea, for a little price, Prometheus!

PROMETHEUS

A little price? — this dire captivity,
These tortures, æons and æons long!.....

HERAKLES

The price
Is small, since it is insufficient to the cost
Of liberty, and has not paid the living wage
Of the soul's nurture in the coin of truth.
Life you have kept inviolate — and so much,
In all your captive and disconsolate years,
Was honourably done. What is there more?
What have you done with life, Prometheus? —
O you have treasured unprofitable things,
Lain sick and idle in the lap of dreams,
And wasted life and strength in senseless war
With vain imaginings!.....

PROMETHEUS

Nay, but with the Living God!

HERAKLES

Who then is God, and what is He?.....

Enough! — I know you, and I know your worth;
And I salute you and acknowledge you,
Prometheus, and your strong, magnificent deeds.
Here I salute and specify in you
The long, defiant life, proud and resolved;
The dim, strong, spiritual, heroic trust;
The courage and the unconquerable will,
Which held you stedfast in the urgent fear
Of dire, fantastic dreams and spectral things.
Yet, in the strict account, nothing is new
Since the beginning, when your splendid deed
Brought light into the darkness of the world; —
And know you well no splendour can suffice
Save for the moment's payment and reward!

The voice of the POET
from far below; sounding clear tho' faint in the distance

No single, excellent deed,
Born of the spirit's utmost need, —
No one magnificent
Stress of impassioned virtue, nobly wrought, —
No honourable and manly pride
Of an eternal conflict, hardly fought, —
No desolation where the soul is tried —
No grim captivity where life is spent —
No pain, no sacrifice,
No strength, no splendour can alone suffice
To pay the constant cost of liberty,

The daily wage of truth's enlightenment.
Nothing accrues! — Of all the soul has been
And learned and done there is no usury,
Save as the Light is more before us seen,
And the occasion more sufficiently
Prepared — more grandly and more arduously!
And, save as we
Are — by the endless labours undismayed —
More apt to learn, more eager to become,
More prompt to go and more resolved to be
Free in the universal truth, which is our home.
The living of the soul is daily earned
And daily spent — to-day the price is paid;
To-day the truth is learned;
Yet is the labour by no means gainsaid,
For all is partial and provisional —
Yea, to the end of all!.....
Yea, we shall hear again the forward call
To-morrow; and to-morrow we shall wake
To find to-morrow's payment still to make;
And we shall rise to-morrow and renew
The labour; and to-morrow truth shall be
As strange and true and splendid as
To-day and yesterday it was,
The way shall be as endless, we
As eager, and the world as new!.....

A moment of silence.

HERAKLES

It is my poet, singing his soul away.....
Hear him, Prometheus, for his songs are sooth —
And all shall come to pass!..... Only, for you
All has been long postponed; but now, at last,
To-morrow and the labour and the truth
Are here at hand — and truth is terrible!
Courage, O Titan! O Prometheus,
Courage, courage! — you shall more need it now
That I am come to strip you of your chains,
Your lifelong honour and your happiness,
And leave you real and bare in the real world,
Than ever when all alone, incessantly,
You stood superb against the power of God
And took no ease of the remorseless pain.....
You shall more need it now to, gloriously,
And more magnificently than God, and more
With loveliness and with simplicity
And the sufficient, quiet, serious strength
Which He had not, who thundered and was hidden,
Assume — resume, perhaps, after so long! —
Dominion over more than ever He
Held under various rule of fear and love.
Courage, Strong Heart, courage! — for now, at last,
You shall recover what you gave away
Such countless vague millenniums ago: —
The Kingdom and the Power and the Glory,
The strength, the will, the clear eternities

Of truth, the sacred miracles of love,
The widening skies, the calm infinities
Of liberty — the inherent heritage of man,
So long estranged under God's usurpation!.....

PROMETHEUS

I shall recover?.....My inheritance?.....
Mine?.....What betides?.....O what shall come to pass?.....
Where is my victory — the full, the flushed
And mystic consummation of my dreams?.....

The voice of the POET
somewhat nearer

Courage! for thus and only thus —
As we are prompt and hazardous,
As we are rapt, religious and austere —
We are victorious,
And find the strange, steep way, and hear
The airs rush into song before our flight,
And pass out of the night,
Persuaded by a single star,
And learn that where the soul's adventures are
The truth's discovery is near,
And the delight
Of liberty, and pæans, and pageantries of light!.....

HERAKLES

Courage! —

PROMETHEUS

My strength and courage shall suffice,

HERAKLES

You shall be more victorious than you dreamed,
Prometheus! — for your victory is truth,
Only conceived in the unfettered mind
Which, of the gross amorphous element
Of life, in its alembic subtly fused
And wonderfully transfigured, makes the clear
Cogency of the universal laws.
Yea, God has long enough stood in the plain,
Noble and forthright way of man's ambition,
Wielded his regency, and for a mess
Of pottage bought his vast inheritance; —
And man shall come into his kingdom!.....God,
As truth discerns, is of the infancy
Of man — the primal, dim, projected shape
In which his anxious mind figured at large,
On the vast shadow of his ignorance,
His sense of the inevitable Unknown,
The chance, blind sum of nameless energies,
Amid whose secret peril he walked in darkness,
Bearing the light of life's concentred fire,
The pure, fine flame of the self-realized soul,
Fearfully on its way, windy with doom.....
For thus, in symbols, fables, parables,
We are expressed; we hear some vague report

Of what we know not, and our minds devise
Some image that shall well enough suffice
To methodize to thought's austere command,
To reason's quiet, inevitable terms,
The garbled jargon that the senses speak —
Which are persuaded of the Something there!.....
Thus rose the myth of God, when time was young,
When, curious of whatever strictly shaped
The horror and hardship of his destiny,
Man's fear and ignorance conceived the cause
In his own likeness, and believed — and wept!
Now we have looked abroad and looked within,
Straining the symbol, and we learn to know,
Quietly and at last, its secret sense,
Shadowed and insufficiently set forth,
Is, in the meaning and the truth, ourselves! —
We are the Gods! We are the Householders
Of heaven and earth and all that in them is!
It is your Self, your universe and mine,
Prometheus — yours and mine and man's forever!

PROMETHEUS

Mine is God's burden of the universe?.....
Mine the relentless energies of God,
Which lurk beneath this candid and benign
Masque of perennial nature, and conspire
To compass man's destruction and despair?.....

I am alone?.....I am responsible?.....
O nothing, nothing of all my dreams comes true!

The voice of the POET
nearer than before

Brave, spiritual, and strong,
Let us take wings and will, O Soul! for we,
We have too long, too idly and too long,
In fate's relentless grip,
Lain like a derelict ship
Cast from the shining circles of the sea
High on the shores of time's captivity.
Let us take wings and will! — perchance
To-day, the least of life's impartial days,
In unpremeditated, common ways,
We shall achieve deliverance —
And wake, and hearken, and hear
The rush of the changing tide
And the shout of the flood returning, deep and wide,
Over the reefs of doubt and fear,
Over the shoals of change and chance,
Over the shores of time — and feel,
Under our keel,
The old ecstatic buoyancy,
The strong, smooth, spacious, sun-starred breast of
the Sea!.....

HERAKLES

Prometheus! Prometheus! Prometheus!—

TWELFTH SCENE

The soul of man can never be enslaved
Save by its own infirmities, nor freed
Save by its very strength and own resolve
And constant vision and supreme endeavour!
You will be free? Then, courage, O my brother! —
O let the soul stand in the open door
Of life and death and knowledge and desire
And see the peaks of thought kindle with sunrise!.....
Then shall the soul return to rest no more,
Nor harvest dreams in the dark fields of sleep.....
Rather the soul shall go with great resolve
To dwell at last upon the shining mountains
In liberal converse with the eternal stars.....
O let the soul feel the unhindered wind
Blow out at sunrise to the dazzled sea,
Strain in its sails and urge its enterprise!.....
Then shall it tarry in the anchorage,
By teeming wharves of vulgar merchandise,
No more — but rather choose to go abroad
Into the great, gold morning, and afar,
Where, from new skies, new seas receive the light.....
O let the soul, at truth's persuasion, wake
And understand! — it shall not then endure
To fail and be at peace and profitless:
For little glory has it of all this world,
And all its strength is nervous and disused
In the low, little labours of mankind.

It is alone and understood by none;
Its speech is not of vain, vile, violent things;
But on its lips the dominant, great voice,
Which is the one true voice, cries out in song
Of Lord-ship and a last deliverance! —
It is the soul of man — and can not stay;
It is the soul of man — and may not rest;
It is the soul of man — and will not fail,
And shall not cease to labour evermore,
Until at last its own infinity
Is in its own perfection all conceived!.....
Prometheus! Prometheus! — God is dead,
And man is overcome! — and you and I
And all men whatsoever whose minds report
The truth, whose lives exemplify the soul —
We are the Heirs of all the universe,
And of ourselves supremely, all in all!
Yea! — for the Lord, who dreamed of regencies
Too little perfect and resplendent, and
Set over them celestial deputies
In His own image, feigned and fabulous,
Is come into His kingdom out of sleep!
Yea! — for the hour is come, the Lord is roused —
And all is His, and all is victory!.....

A scant moment's silence. Then, his voice sounding like a summons:

Prometheus! — You are free! — Prometheus! —

TWELFTH SCENE

PROMETHEUS raises his arms. The fetters fall from his limbs. He takes a step forward to the edge of the precipice.

PROMETHEUS

Free.....

His face turns skyward. In the last, dark flush of the sunset the EAGLE appears, swooping swiftly down.

God's winged blood-hound falls to his quarry.....

HERAKLES

Your eagle comes as a tamed hawk returns.....

The EAGLE sweeps down and lights on the shoulder of PROMETHEUS, where it folds its great wings and remains motionless.

The voice of the POET
close at hand

And then! — O then it is, after the deed is done,
And the Great Gates stand open, and we are gone,
Who shall no more return,
Foundered and tempest-driven,
As drift and wreckage on the shores of time —
O then and thus it is we learn
How all the soul was skilled to ask is given!
And wonderfully and nobly we discern
A sense of life transcendent and sublime,

A knowledge that we shall by no means miss
The love, the grace, the grandeur that we earn!
For then and thus it is
The soul achieves its metamorphosis,
The Sleeper wakes within the House of Dream,
And, deep within the vision of his eyes,
In the starred, silent heights of heaven
The incommensurable night is riven,
And in the blinding beam
Of dawn across unfathomable skies,
His wings flash skyward from their shattered
chrysalis!.....
Thus do we end our exile; then it is
We find the last release, and rise,
Knowing the truth which testifies
That pain and time and long captivity
And life and death and destined circumstance
Are only phases of our ignorance!.....
And thus it is at last that we,
After great love and long adjournments, see
The pinnacles of thought lighten with song —
And all the spirits of the Free,
Calm and majestic, move along
In an ascending theory!.....
While we stand with wings and will
Nerved to the task before us still;
While we watch with stedfast eyes,
Clear and valiant as a bell,

The flame of thought that never dies;
While we explore the secret none can tell;
While we prepare, in tense tranquillity,
For the inveterate miracle,
The soul's perennial truth, the truth's perennial liberty!.....

Ascending from below, the POET and the WOMAN appear, faint and exhausted, on the level where HERAKLES and PROMETHEUS are standing.

The WOMAN

Herakles!.....

She falls fainting to the ground.

The POET

Love has spent its strength.....and I
Am hardly come so far after my vision.....

He falls on his knees beside the WOMAN.

HERAKLES

O human heart of love! — O Visionary,
Filled with the sacred utterance of song! —
Welcome! The hour is come and gone. Behold! —
Yours is the victory, for man is free!

PROMETHEUS

Free! — I hear Pyrrha crying in the darkness.....
And Epimetheus calls me.....and Pandora

Sings in the total night desolate songs
And strange, old legends, dim with secrecies.....
I see Deukalion's face, fierce and afraid,
Staring aloft into the new, bleak light!.....
I was a thing of terror and of tears
To them — more sad and terrible than death! —
When, with my hollow reed of the pure flame
Of everlasting, living light, I came
Among them, flushed, triumphant, fabulous, —
Came as the herald of life's endless task,
With trumpet-calls and splendid exhortations,
Eloquent in my hour of victory!
I was a thing of terror and of tears
To them — my turn has come to fear and weep!
For now I stand in the beginning — I,
Prometheus! — as they stood in the beginning —
Pyrrha, Deukalion, Hellen, mortal men
And women — with the life they had not asked!.....
I stand in the beginning, stand and weep
Here in the new, bleak light of liberty,
As once they stood and wept, seeing the light!.....
I stand in the beginning — I, who once
Believed fond fancies of the mystic end —
The unimaginable, fantastic, dim
Apotheosis of my hopes and dreams!.....
I stand in the beginning! God is dead,
And man is overcome, and I am free! —
And who am I?.....And what is liberty?.....

TWELFTH SCENE

HERAKLES

Liberty is the freedom to become
Free.....

The POET

The soul's long day's work is liberty.

HERAKLES turns and begins to ascend the mountain.

PROMETHEUS

Mine is the long day's work..... Mine is the soul.....
Mine is the freedom to be free..... I know
At last and without question, suddenly,
There is no Power in whose almighty hands
I can lay down the burden of this world;
And I am all alone and utterly
Real and responsible; and now my house
Of life is ruined, and I am left alone,
Shelterless and at large, like a poor beast.....
All that I was — my value and my worth,
My sense and strength — is gone!..... The mind's defiance,
The heart's indomitable rebellion, are
No more; no more the tortures and the chains;
Honour and pride and happiness no more!
These were my virtue, these my hope and faith,
These were my own, my life's, significance:—
They are no more!.....And in the stead of them,
What is my meaning, aim, and end?.....

HERAKLES

standing higher in the mountain, in the place where he first appeared

To you,
As you to Pyrrha and Deukalion,
Now I renew, appraised and amplified
And more sublime, more glorious, more secure,
The one true, perfect, and profitable gift! —
All that there is at all I give you! — Lo,
Yours is the Universe and yours the Soul,
And life and labour and liberty are yours
To understand and blend them into one!.....
All that there is I give you, and no less,
And nothing more! — no phantoms and vain dreams,
No spectral fears and false expectancies,
No empty honour, no vainglorious joy.
These are destroyed — but not that, in their stead,
Other, tho' lordlier, vain imaginings
And awful ghosts and unsubstantial things
Should fill the shadows whence their shapes are gone; —
Rather are they destroyed that in their room
The soul of man may go abroad at last,
Gravely and quietly, as befits the soul;
And freely, masterfully and wisely dwell
In the waste, spacious realm, withheld so long!

PROMETHEUS

I understand at last. The end is come

Of all my dreams, for now the new bleak light
Of the Beginning is upon mine eyes,
And I am wakened!.....And I understand
At last.....And Truth is grave and chaste as death —
And radiant as life is in its whole strength!
So, as I may, I take the stern, great gift:
Mine is the Soul, and mine the Universe;
Mine is the burden, mine the task. I know
The price of Truth, the worth of Liberty.
I understand at last — and now my strength
Returns! — Where are the labours and the life?.....
Where is the conflict?.....Where the victory?.....

HERAKLES

Knowledge alone is victory! When all
Is understood, all is subdued, received,
Possessed and perfect. For the soul of man
Is, in the universe of force and change,
Of blind, immeasurable energies,
Subtile and secret and supremely one,
The sole self-realized power, the single strength
Aimed and reflective and perfectible.
Therefore alone the mind's conception turns
Chaos to cosmos, ignorance to truth,
Force to the freedom of articulate laws —
Giving to phases of the senseless flux,
One after one, the soul's identity.
Yea, of the soul is all our hope! To know

Is truth and freedom! — Therefore, O my Brother,
Therefore beyond us, in the vast Unknown,
Waiting the power and conquest of the mind,
Is the far prospect of our enterprise!.....
And should we come into dominion! — then,
O then, at last, when all is lived and learned,
Loved and received in its eternal kind —
When we are Gods and Saviours, every one —
When in communion and accord we dwell
As native in each far, impermanent star,
And in the inhospitable vacancies
Are welcome and securely domiciled —
When we are strangers nowhere in the earth
Or sea, and nowhere in the being of man —
When the long life of all man's endless lives,
Its gradual pregnancies, its pangs and throes,
Its countless multitudes of perished Gods
And outworn forms and spent humanities, —
When all the cosmic process of the past
Stands in the immediate compass of our minds —
When all is present to us and all is known,
Even to the least, even to the uttermost,
Even to the first and last — when, over all,
The widening circles of our thought expand
To infinite horizons everywhere —
Then, tenoned in our foothold on the still,
Supernal, central pinnacle of being,
Shall we not look abroad and look within,

Over the total Universe, the vast,
Complex and vital sum of force and form,
And say, in one, sufficient utterance,
The single, whole, transcendent Truth, — "I am!"

A brief silence.

The POET
rising to his feet

Come! I will lead you down, Prometheus!

PROMETHEUS

Down.....
My Son! — My Brother! — must we say farewell?

HERAKLES

Hither away are the Hesperides.....

The POET

Come! I will lead you down, Prometheus, down,
Where, in reality, in deed, in truth,
Your work begins!

PROMETHEUS

Where does the work begin?

HERAKLES

There, wheresoever the soul's dominion ends!

For a moment no one moves. Then PROMETHEUS slowly gathers the WOMAN in his huge arms,

and begins to descend the mountain, the POET leading the way. The last vestige of sunset is gone. The night is calm and perfect. The thin figure of the POET and the vast stature of the TITAN, with the insensible WOMAN upon his breast, and the great EAGLE still perched upon his shoulder, loom vaguely in the still moonlight. HERAKLES stands motionless on his eminence,— clear, strong, and solitary against the stars.

The End.

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
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